

# Vincent van Gogh

by Vincent van Gogh

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1. *Self-Portrait dedicated to Paul Gauguin*,  
Arles, September 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 50 cm. Fogg Art Museum,  
Harvard University Art Museums,  
Cambridge, Massachusetts.

## ***“As through a looking glass, by dark reason...”***

He sat on that chair. His pipe lies on a reed seat next to an open tobacco pouch. He slept in that bed, lived in that house. It was there that he cut off a piece of his ear. We see him with a bandaged head, the pipe in the corner of his mouth, looking at us. Vincent van Gogh's life and work are so intertwined that it is hardly possible to see his pictures without reading in them the story of his life, a life which has been described so many times that it is by now the stuff of legend. Van Gogh is the incarnation of the suffering, the misunderstood martyr of modern art, the emblem of the artist as an outsider.

In 1996 Jan Hulsker, the famous van Gogh scholar, published a corrected catalogue of the complete works in which he questioned the authenticity of 45 paintings and drawings. What concerned Hulsker were not only the forgeries, but also canvases that were falsely attributed to van Gogh. In a similar vein, the British art historian Martin Bailey claimed to have recognized more than one hundred false 'van Gogh's,' among them the Portrait of Dr. Gachet, which exists in two versions. A Japanese industrialist purchased one of these in 1990 for 82.5 million dollars – the highest price ever paid for a painting. The new owner then shocked the public by announcing that after his death he wanted to be burned with the picture. Out of respect for the feelings of European art lovers, he later changed his mind and decided to build a museum to house his collection. However, if someone should prove that the Portrait of Dr. Gachet is a fake, public interest in the painting would disappear.

It became apparent early on that the events of van Gogh's life would play a major role in the reception of his works. The first article about the painter was published in January 1890 in the *Mercure de France*. The author of the article, Albert Aurier, was in contact with a friend of van Gogh named Emile Bernard, from whom he learned the details of van Gogh's illness. At the time, van Gogh was living in a mental hospital in Saint-Rémy, near Arles. The year before, he cut off a piece of his right ear. Without explicitly revealing these facts from the artist's life, Aurier nevertheless introduced his knowledge of the apparent insanity of the painter into his discussion of the paintings themselves. Thus, he used terms like “obsessive passion”<sup>[1]</sup> and “persistent preoccupation.”<sup>[2]</sup> Van Gogh seemed to him a “terrible and demented genius, often sublime, sometimes grotesque, always at the brink of the pathological.”<sup>[3]</sup> Aurier regarded the painter as a “Messiah... who would regenerate the decrepitude of our art and perhaps of our imbecile and industrialist society.”<sup>[4]</sup>

With his characterization of the artist as a mad genius, this critic laid the foundation for the van Gogh myth, which began to emerge shortly after the death of the painter. After all, Aurier did not believe that van Gogh would ever be understood by the general public: “But whatever happens, even if it became fashionable to buy his canvases – which is unlikely – at the prices of M. Meissonier's little infamies, I don't think that much sincerity could ever enter into that belated admiration of the general public.”<sup>[5]</sup> A few days after van Gogh's funeral in Auvers-sur-Oise, Dr. Gachet, who looked after the painter at the end of his life, wrote to van Gogh's brother Theo:

“This sovereign contempt for life, doubtless a result of his impetuous love of art, is extraordinary... If Vincent were still alive, it would take years and years until the human



art triumphed. His death however, is, so to speak, the glorious result of the fight between two opposed principles: light and darkness, life and death.”[\[6\]](#)



2. *Fisherman's Wife at Scheveningen*,  
Etten, December 1881. Watercolour, 23.5 x 9.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



Van Gogh neither despised life nor was he its master. In his letters, nearly seven hundred of which have been published, he often wrote about his desire for love and safety:

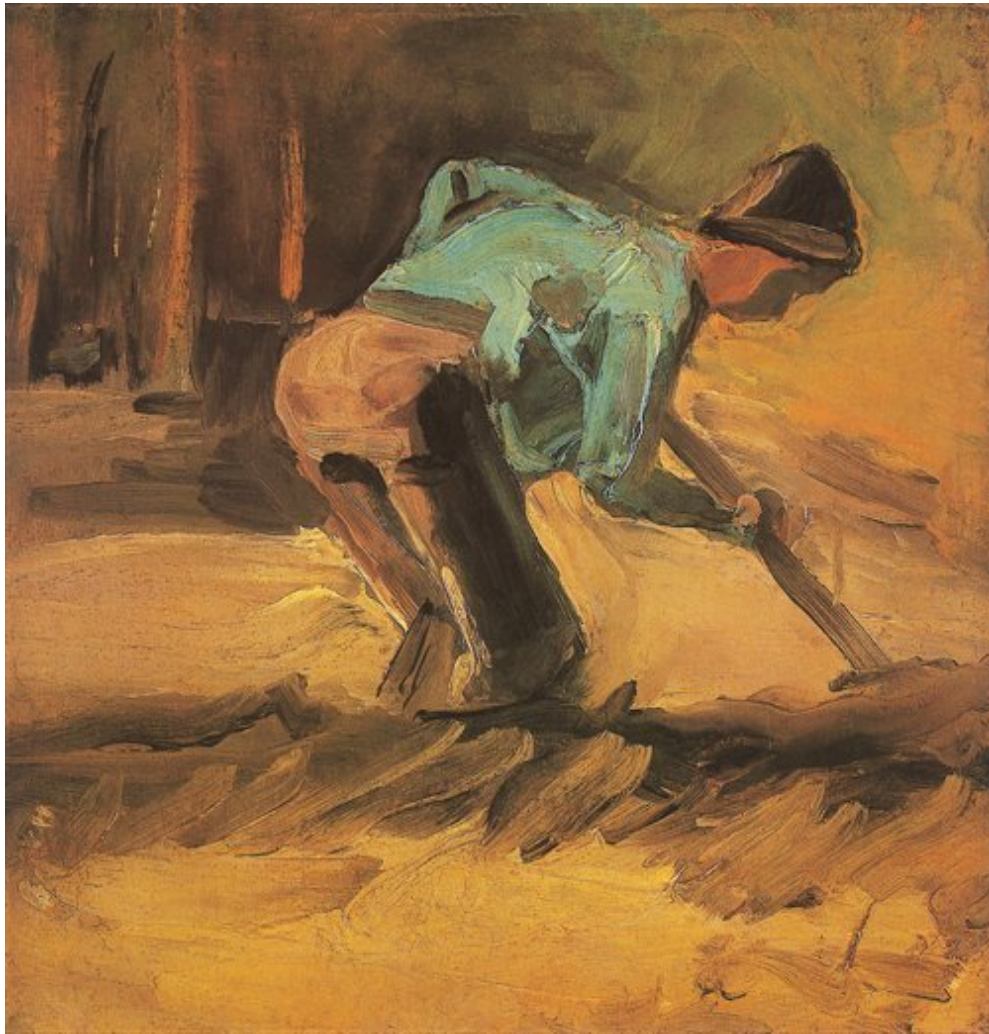
“I should like to be with a woman for a change, I cannot live without love, without a woman. I would not value life at all, if there were not something infinite, something deep, something real.”<sup>[7]</sup>

On several occasions he stressed that it would be “more worthwhile to make children than pictures.”<sup>[8]</sup> Vincent van Gogh’s rather bourgeois dreams of hearth and home never materialized. His first love, Ursula Loyer, married someone else. His cousin Kee, already a mother and widow, refused him partly for material reasons: van Gogh was unable to care for her and her child. He tried to build up a family life with a prostitute named Sien. He finally left her because his brother Theo, on whom he depended financially, wanted him to end the relationship. Van Gogh’s relationship with the twenty-one-year-old Marguerite Gachet is only known through a friend of Marguerite, who maintained that they had fallen in love, but the usually freethinking Dr. Gachet barred van Gogh from then on. Van Gogh not only sought the love of women, but also that of his family and friends, although he never achieved it in the measure he would have wished. Several days before his suicide, he summed up his lifelong failure to find a satisfying intimacy in the following enigmatic remark: “As through a looking glass, by a dark reason – so it has remained.”<sup>[9]</sup> The parson’s son had taken his analogy from The Excellencies of Love in the first epistle to the Corinthians: “For now we see through a glass, darkly: but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” This longing for a place in the community and the struggle for renown are two themes that can be traced throughout van Gogh’s life.



3. *Peasant Woman Digging*,  
Nuenen, July 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 42 x 32 cm. The Barber Institute of Fine Arts,  
University of Birmingham, Birmingham.





4. *Peasant Working*,  
The Hague, August 1882.  
Oil on paper on wood, 30 x 29 cm.  
Private Collection.



5. *Peasant Burning Weeds*,  
Drenthe, October 1883.  
Oil on wood, 30.5 x 39.5 cm.  
Private Collection.



6. *Sheaves of Wheat*,  
Nuenen, July-August 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**The Hague, 13 December 1872**

Dear Theo,

What good news I've just read in Father's letter. I wish you luck with all my heart. I'm sure you will like it there; it's such a fine firm. It will be quite a change for you.

I am so glad that both of us are now to be in the same profession and in the same firm. We must be sure to write to each other regularly.

I hope that I'll see you before you leave; we still have a lot to talk about. I believe that Brussels is a very pleasant city, but it's bound to feel strange for you in the beginning. Write to me soon in any case. Well, goodbye for now, this is just a brief note dashed off in haste, but I had to tell you how delighted I am at the news. Best wishes, and believe me, always,

Your loving brother,

Vincent

I don't envy you having to walk to Oisterwijk every day in this awful weather. Regards from the Roos family.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh  
The Hague, January 1873**

My dear Theo,

I heard from home that you arrived safe and sound at Brussels and that your first impression was good.

I know so well how strange you must feel in the beginning, but don't lose courage, you'll get on all right.

You must soon write me how you are getting along and how you like your boardinghouse. I hope it will be satisfactory. Father wrote me that you are on good terms with Mr. Schmidt; that is right - I think he is a good fellow from whom you can learn a great deal.

What happy days we spent together at Christmas! I think of them so often. You will also remember them a long time, as they were the last days you spent at home. Don't forget to tell me what pictures you see and which you like best.

I am very busy just now at the beginning of the year.

My New Year began well; they have granted me an increase of ten guilders (I therefore earn fifty guilders per month), and they have given me a bonus of fifty guilders as a present. Isn't that splendid? I hope to be able to shift for myself now.

I am very happy that you work in the same firm. It is such a splendid house; the more one works there, the more ambition it gives you.

The beginning is perhaps more difficult than anything else, but keep heart, it will turn out all right.

Will you ask Schmidt what the price of the Album Corot, lithographs by Émile Vernier is? Somebody asked for it at the store, and I know they have it in Brussels. Next time I write, I'll send you my picture, which I had taken last Sunday. Have you already been to the Palace Ducal? Don't fail to go there when you have a chance.

Well, boy, keep your courage up. All the friends send you their compliments and good wishes. Give my regards to Schmidt and Eduard and write to me soon. Adieu.

Your loving brother, Vincent.

You know my address is,  
Lange Beestenmarkt, 32

Or Goupil & Co., Plaats





7. *Landscape with Wheelbarrow*,  
The Hague, September 1883.  
Watercolour, 24.9 x 35.7 cm.  
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.



8. *Peasants Planting Potatoes*,  
Nuenen, April 1885. Oil on canvas, 33 x 41 cm.  
Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**The Hague, 17 March 1873**

Dear Theo,

It is time for you to hear from me again. I am longing to hear how you and Uncle Hein are, so I hope that you will be able to find time to write me.

I suppose you have heard that I am going to London, probably very soon. I do hope that we shall see each other before then. If there is any chance, I shall go to Helvoirt at Easter, but that depends on Iterson, who is away on business. I cannot go away before he comes back.

It will be quite a different life for me in London, as I shall probably have to live alone in rooms. I'll have to take care of many things I don't have to worry about now.

I am looking forward very much to seeing London, as you can imagine, but still I am sorry to leave here. Now that it has been decided that I shall go away, I feel how strongly I am attached to The Hague. Well, it can't be helped, and I intend not to take things too hard. It will be splendid for my English - I can understand it well enough, but I cannot speak it as well as I would wish.

I heard from Anna that you had your picture taken. If you have one to spare, don't forget me.

How is Uncle Hein? Not better, I am afraid. And how is Aunt? Can Uncle keep himself busy, and does he suffer much pain? Give him my warmest regards. I think of him so often. How is business? I think you must be rushed with work; we certainly are here. You must feel at home in the business by this time.

How is your boardinghouse - does it still please you? That's an important thing. Be sure to tell me more about the pictures you see. A fortnight ago I was in Amsterdam to see an exhibition of the pictures that are going from here to Vienna. It was very interesting, and I am curious to know what impression the Dutch artists will make in Vienna. I am also curious to see the English painters; we see so little of them because almost everything remains in England.

In London Goupil has no gallery, but sells only directly to art dealers. Uncle Vincent will be here at the end of this month, and I am looking forward to hearing more particulars from him.



The Haanebeeks and Aunt Fie always ask how you are and send you their best wishes. What delightful weather we are having! I enjoy it as much as I can; last Sunday I went out boating with Willem[\[10\]](#). How I should have liked to stay here this summer, but we must take things as they are. And now adieu. Best wishes and write to me soon. Say goodbye for me to Uncle and Aunt, Mr. Schmidt and Eduard. I am looking forward to Easter.

Always your loving brother, Vincent.

Theo, I strongly advise you to smoke a pipe; it is a remedy for the blues, which I happen to have had now and then lately. I just received your letter, many thanks. I like the photograph very much, it is a good likeness. I will let you know as soon as I know something more about my going to Helvoirt; it would be nice if you could come on the same day. Adieu.



9. *Digger*,  
Etten, September 1881.  
Black chalk, wash, pen and diluted ink,  
opaque watercolour and traces of

charcoal on laid paper, 44 x 34 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





10. *Woman Working*,  
Nuenen, August 1885. Charcoal and stump,  
54.5 x 37 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, 13 June 1873**

Dear Theo,

My address is c/o Messrs. Goupil & Co., 17 Southampton Street, Strand, London. You must be eager to hear from me, so I will not keep you waiting any longer for a letter.

I hear from home that you are living with Mr. Schmidt now and that Father has been to see you. I certainly hope this will please you better than your former boardinghouse, and I'm sure it will.

I am very anxious for a letter; write me soon, and tell me how you spend your day, etc. You must tell me especially what pictures you have seen lately, and also if any new etchings or lithographs have been published. Let me know as much as you can about these things, for I do not see much of them here as it is only a wholesale house.

Considering the circumstances, I am doing pretty well. So far the boardinghouse where I am staying pleases me. There are also three German boarders who are very fond of music, they play the piano and sing, so we spend very pleasant evenings together. I am not so busy here as I was in The Hague; I work only from nine in the morning to six in the evening, and on Saturdays we close at four o'clock. I live in one of the suburbs of London, where it is relatively quiet. It reminds me of Tilburg or some such place.

I spent some very pleasant days in Paris, and, as you can imagine, I enjoyed all the beautiful things I saw at the exhibition and in the Louvre and the Luxembourg. The house in Paris is splendid and much bigger than I had thought, especially the one in the Place de l'Opera [\[11\]](#).

Life is very expensive here, my accommodation alone costs me eighteen shillings a week, washing excepted, and then I still have to take my dinner in the city. Last Sunday I went to the country with Mr. Obach, my principal, to Boxhill; it is a high hill about six hours by road from London, partially chalky and overgrown with box [wood] and on one side a wood of high oak trees. The country is beautiful here, quite different from Holland or Belgium. Everywhere you see charming parks with high trees and shrubs. Everyone is allowed to walk there. At Easter, I made an interesting excursion with the Germans, but these gentlemen spend a great deal of money and I shall not go out with them in the future.

I was glad to hear from home that Uncle Hein's health is good. Give him and Aunt my best and tell them something about me. Give my compliments to Mr. Schmidt and Eduard and write to me soon. Adieu, best wishes,  
Vincent



11. *Peasant Women in a Field*,  
Nieuw-Amsterdam, October 1883.  
Oil on canvas, 27 x 35.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





12. *Boy with a Sickle*,  
Etten, October-November 1881.  
Black chalk, charcoal, grey wash and opaque  
watercolour on laid paper, 47 x 61 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, 20 July 1873**

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter, which was very welcome. I am glad you are doing well and that you like living with Mr. Schmidt. Mr. Obach was very pleased to have met you. I hope that in the future we shall do much business with each other. That picture of Linder's is very beautiful.

As to the photo engravings, I have never seen them being made; I know a little about how they are done, but not enough to explain.

At first English art did not appeal to me; one must get used to it. But there are clever painters here, among others, Millais, who has painted: "The Huguenot," "Ophelia," etc., of which I think you know the engravings; his things are beautiful. Then there is Boughton, whose "Puritans Going to Church" is in our Galerie Photographique; I have seen wonderful things by him. Among the old painters, Constable was a landscape painter who lived about thirty years ago; he is splendid - his work reminds me of Diaz and Daubigny. Then there are Reynolds and Gainsborough, whose forte was very beautiful ladies' portraits, and Turner, whose engravings you must have seen.

Some good French painters live here, including Tissot, of whose work there are several photographs in our Galerie Photographique; and Otto Weber and Heilbuth. The latter is at present painting exquisitely beautiful pictures in the manner of Linder.

Sometime you must write me if there are any photographs of Wauters's work other than "Hugo Van der Goes" and "Mary of Burgundy," and if you know about any photographs of pictures by Lagye and De Braekeleer. I don't mean the elder Braekeleer, but, I think, a son of his who had three beautiful pictures called "Antwerp," "The School" and "The Atlas" at the last exhibition in Brussels.

I am quite contented here; I walk a lot and the neighborhood where I live is quiet, pleasant and fresh - I was really very lucky to find it. Still, I often think with regret of the delightful Sundays at Scheveningen and other things, but what's the use of worrying?

Thanks for what you wrote me about pictures. If you happen to see anything by Lagye, De Braekeleer, Wauters, Maris, Tissot, George Saal,

Jundt, Zeim, or Mauve, you must not forget to tell me; those are the painters I am very fond of, and whose work you will probably see something of.

Enclosed is a copy of the poem about the painter who “entered ‘The Swan,’ the inn where he was lodging,” which I am sure you remember. It is typical Brabant, and I am fond of it. L. copied it for me the last evening I was home [\[12\]](#).

How I should like to have you here. What pleasant days we spent together at The Hague; I think so often of that walk on the Rijswijk road, when we drank milk at the mill after the rain. When we send back the pictures we have from you, I will send you a picture of that mill by Weissenbruch; perhaps you remember him, his nickname is Merry Weiss. That Rijswijk road holds memories for me which are perhaps the most beautiful I have. If we meet again, maybe we shall talk about them once more.

And now, boy, I wish you well. Think of me from time to time and write me soon, it is such a delight to get a letter.

Vincent



13. *Potato Planting*,  
Nuenen, September 1884.  
Oil on canvas, 70.5 x 170 cm.  
Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Van Stockum - Haanebeek family  
London, 7 August 1873**

Dear friends,

It was a pleasant surprise to me to receive Carolien's letter. Thanks. With all my heart I hope she is quite well again; a good thing it is over now!

In your next letter I should like to hear more about that last play you wrote. I was really amazed: for ten characters - it must be the biggest you have done.

These last days I have greatly enjoyed reading the poems of John Keats; he is a poet who, I think, is not very well known in Holland. He is the favourite of all the painters here, and so I started reading him. Here is something by him. His best-known piece is "The Eve of St. Agnes," but it is a bit too long to copy.

I have visited neither Crystal Palace nor the Tower yet, nor Tussod[13] ; I am not in a hurry to see everything. For the present I am quite satisfied with the museums, parks, etc.; they interest me more.

Last Monday I had a nice day. The first Monday in August is a holiday here. I went with one of the Germans to Dulwich, an hour and a half outside L., to see the museum there, and after that we took about an hour's walk to another village.

The country is so beautiful here; many people who have their businesses in London live in some village outside L. and go to town by train every day; perhaps I shall do the same shortly, if I can find a cheap room somewhere. But moving is so horrible that I shall stop here as long as possible, although everything is not as beautiful as it seemed to me in the beginning. Perhaps it is my own fault, so I shall bear with it a little longer.

Pardon me if this letter is not as I should like it to be, for I am writing in a hurry. I wanted to congratulate you on Willem's birthday and wish you many happy returns.

I was most pleased to learn that you have renewed your acquaintance with the Tersteeg family. I have been hoping you would for a long time.



14. *A Peasant Woman Digging  
in Front of Her Cottage*,  
Nuenen, June 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 31.3 x 42 cm.  
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.



15. *Twilight at Loosduine*,  
The Hague, August 1883.  
Oil on canvas on wood, 33 x 50 cm.  
Centraal Museum, Utrecht.

When you have a chance, please let me know what photographs you have received - I am curious to know. I have had a letter from Marinus, from which I learned that he is going to Amsterdam. This will mean a great change for him; I hope he will do well. I was very glad he wrote me.

A few days ago a brother of Iterson's paid me a call, and for the first time since May I had a chance to speak Dutch. We live far apart, much to my regret.

Good luck to you. Remember me to all in the Poten. Good luck!

Yours truly, Vincent

Gladden my heart with a letter as soon as you can find time.

[Enclosed]

THE EVE OF SAINT MARK (Unfinished)

Upon a Sabbath-day it fell;  
Twice holy was the Sabbath-bell,  
That call'd the folk to evening prayer;  
The chilly sunset faintly told  
Of unmatur'd green vallies cold,  
Of the green thorny bloomless hedge,  
Of rivers new with spring-time sedge,  
Of primroses by shelter'd rills,  
Of daisies on the aguish hill.  
Bertha was a maiden fair,  
Dwelling in the old Minister-square;  
From her fire-side she could see,  
Sidelong its rich antiquity,  
Far as the bishop's garden-wall;  
Where sycamores and elm-trees tall,  
Full-leav'd, the forest had outstript,  
By no sharp north-wind ever nipt,  
So shelter'd by the mighty pile.  
All was silent, all was gloom,  
Abroad and in the homely room;  
Down she sat, poor cheated soul!  
And struck a lamp from dismal coal;  
Lean'd forward, with bright drooping hair,  
And slant book, full against the glare.



Untir'd she read, her shadow still  
Glower'd about, as it would fill  
The room with wildest forms and shades,  
As though some ghostly queen of spades  
Had come to mock behind her back,  
And dance, and ruffle her garments black;  
Untir'd she read the legend page,  
Of Holy Mark, from youth to age,  
On land, on sea, in pagan chains,  
Rejoicing for his many pains...

JOHN KEATS (1818)

The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream: "He awoke and found it truth."

[Written on the back of the same page]

AUTUMN

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend to the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.  
Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, -  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue...



16. *The Thatched Cottage*,  
Nuenen, June-July 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 85 cm.  
Städelsches Kunstinstitut und  
Städtische Galerie, Frankfurt am Main.



17. *The Vicarage at Nuenen*,  
Nuenen, October 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 33 x 43 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, 19 November 1873**

Dear Theo,

I want to be sure you hear from me soon after your arrival at The Hague. I am eager to hear what your first impressions were of your new position and home. I heard that Mr. Schmidt gave you such a beautiful souvenir. That proves you have been very satisfactory in every respect. I am glad that we now work in the same house of Goupil. Lately we have had many pictures and drawings here; we sold a great many, but not enough yet - it must become something more established and solid. I think there is still much work to do in England, but it will not be successful at once. Of course, the first thing necessary is to have good pictures, and that will be very difficult. Well, we must take things as they are and make the best of it.

How is business in Holland? Here the ordinary engravings after Brocard do not sell at all, the good burin engravings sell pretty well. From the "Venus Anadyomene" after Ingres we have already sold twenty *épreuves d'artiste*. It is a pleasure to see how well the photographs sell, especially the coloured ones, and there is a big profit in them. We sell the Musée Goupil & Co. photographs only en papillottes, on an average of a hundred a day.

I think you will like the work at the house at The Hague as soon as you have got used to it. I am sure you will like your home with the Roos family. Walk as much as your time will allow. Give my best love to everybody at Roos's.

You must write me sometime whom you like best among the older painters as well as among the moderns. Don't forget, as I am curious to know. Go to the museum as often as you can; it is a good thing to know the old painters also. If you have the chance, read about art, especially art magazines, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, etc. As soon as I have the opportunity, I will send you a book by Burger about the museums at The Hague and Amsterdam. Please send it back when you have read it.

Ask Iterson to write me when he has time, and especially to send me a list of the painters who have won awards at the Paris exhibition. Is Somerwill still in the office or did he leave when you arrived?

I am all right. I have a pleasant home, and although the house here is not so interesting as the one in The Hague, it is perhaps well that I am here.



Later on, especially when the sale of pictures grows more important, I shall perhaps be of use.

And then, I cannot tell you how interesting it is to see London and English business and the way of life, which differs so much from ours.

You must have had pleasant days at home. How I should like to see them all again. Give my compliments to everybody who inquires after me, especially at Tersteeg's, Haanebeek, Auntie Fie, Stockum and Roos; and tell Betsy Tersteeg something about me when you see her. And now, boy, good luck to you, write to me soon.

Vincent

Do you have my room at Roos's or the one you slept in last summer?



18. *The Farm*,  
The Hague, September 1883.  
Oil on canvas on wood, 28.5 x 39.5 cm.  
Private Collection, London.



19. *Cottage with Decrepit Barn  
and Stooping Woman,*  
Nuenen, July 1885. Oil on canvas,  
62 x 113 cm. Private Collection.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, January 1874**

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter. My warm good wishes for a very happy New Year. I know you are doing well at The Hague, because Mr. Tersteeg told me so. I can see from your letter that you are taking a keen interest in art, and that's a good thing, old fellow. I'm glad you like Millet, Jacque, Schreyer, Lambinet, Frans Hals, etc., for as Mauve says, "That's it." That painting by Millet, *L'angélu du soir*, "that's it," indeed - that's magnificent, that's poetry. How I wish I could have another talk with you about art; but we'll just have to keep writing to each other about it. Admire as much as you can; most people don't admire enough.

Here are the names of a few the painters I particularly like. Scheffer, Delaroche, Hébert, Hamon, Leys, Tissot, Lagye, Boughton, Millais, Thijs [Matthijs] Mans, De Groux, De Braekeleer, Jr., Millet, Jules Breton, Feyen-Perrin, Eugène Feyen, Brion, Jundt, George Saal, Israëls, Anker, Knaus, Vautier, Jourdan, Jalabert, Antigna, Compté-Calix, Rochussen, Meissonier, Zamacois, Madrazo, Ziem, Boudin, Gérôme, Fromentin, de Tournemine, Pasini, Decamps, Bonington, Diaz, Th. Rousseau, Troyon, Dupré, Paul Huet, Corot, Jacque, Otto Weber, Daubigny, Wahlberg, Bernier, Émile Breton, Chenu, César de Cock, Mile. Collart, Bodmer, Koekkoek, Schelfhout, Weissenbruch, and last [but] not least, Maris and Mauve.

But I could carry on like that for I don't know how long, and then there are still all the old masters, and I am sure I have forgotten some of the best of the modern ones.

Do go on doing a lot of walking and keep up your love of nature, for that is the right way to understand art better and better. Painters understand nature and love her and teach us to see.

And then there are painters who never do anything that is no good, who cannot do anything bad, just as there are ordinary people who can do nothing but good.

I'm getting on very well here. I've got a delightful home and I'm finding it very pleasurable taking a look at London and the English way of life and the English people themselves, and then I've got nature and art and poetry,



and if that isn't enough, what is? But I haven't forgotten Holland and especially not The Hague and Brabant.

We are busy at the office doing stocktaking, but it will all be over in five days, we got off more lightly than you did in The Hague.

I hope that, like me, you had a happy Christmas.

And so, my boy, best wishes and write to me soon, Je t'écris un peu au hasard ce qui me vient dans ma plume

(I have written to you in this manner just as it came into my pen), I hope you'll be able to make something of it.

Goodbye, regards to everybody at work and to anybody else who asks after me, especially everybody at Aunt Fie's and at the Haanebeeks'.

Vincent



20. *Flower Beds in Holland*,  
The Hague, April 1883. Oil on canvas  
mounted on panel, 48.9 x 66 cm.  
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon,  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



21. *Evening Landscape*,  
Nuenen, April 1885. Oil on canvas, 35 x 43 cm.  
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, 30 March 1874**

Dear Theo,

I have received your gift, included in a letter to me, of a guilder intended for the purchase of a pair of cuff links. I thank you very cordially, old man, but you should not have; I have more money than necessary.

Thanks for the letter which I received this morning. I was very glad to hear that Mauve is engaged to Jet Carbentus. That is fine...I was pleased to hear that you are doing so well.

You have done well to read the book by Burger; you should devour books on art as much as possible, especially The Gazette de Beaux-Arts, etc. By all means try to get a good knowledge of pictures. That picture by Apol we have here now is good, but last year he painted the same subject and I thought it was better and brighter than this one.

I am glad that you go to see Uncle Cor now and then; he has pictures and prints which you can never see at the house in The Hague.

I, too, am very busy just now and am glad of it, for that is what I want. Adieu, boy, keep in good spirits. I wish you well. Greetings to Iterson.

Vincent





22. *Path in Autumn*,  
Nuenen, October 1884.  
Oil on canvas on wood, 98.5 x 66 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





23. *Lane of Poplars at Sunset*,  
Nuenen, October 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 33 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, 31 July 1874**

Dear Theo,

I am glad you've been reading Michelet and that you understand him so well. If that kind of book teaches us anything it is that there is much more to love than people generally suppose. To me, that book has been both a revelation and a Gospel.

'Il n'y a pas de vieille femme!'[There are no old women.] (That does not mean that there are no old women, only that a woman does not grow old as long as she loves and is loved.) And then a chapter like "The Aspirations of Autumn," how rich that is ... That a woman is a quite different being' from a man, and a being that we do not yet know, or at best only superficially, as you put it, yes, that I am sure of. And that a man and a woman can become one, that is to say, one whole and not two halves, I believe that too.

Anna is bearing up well; we go on marvelous walks together. It is so beautiful here, if one just has a good and single eye without too many beams in it. And if one does have that eye, then it is beautiful everywhere.

Father is far from well, although he and Mother say that he's better. Yesterday we received a letter with all sorts of plans (wouldn't we just try this and that) which will prove to be unworkable and certainly useless and at the end Father said once again that he leaves it all to us, etc., etc. Rather petty and disagreeable, Theo, and it reminded me so much of Grandfather's letters, but qu'y faire [What can you do?]. Our beloved Aunts are staying there now and are no doubt doing much good! Things are as they are and what can a person do about it, as Jong Jochem said.

Anna and I look at the newspaper faithfully every day and reply to whatever advertisements there are. On top of that we have already registered with a Governess agency. So we are doing what we can. More haste less speed.

I'm glad that you go round to see the Haanebeeks so often, give them all my kindest regards and tell them some of my news.

The painting by Thijs Maris that Mr. Tersteeg has bought must be beautiful, I had already heard about it and have myself bought and sold one quite similar.

My interest in drawing has died down here in England, but maybe I'll be in the mood again some day or other. Right now I am doing a great deal of reading.

On the 1st of January, 1875 we shall probably be moving to another, larger shop. Mr. Obach is in Paris at the moment deciding whether or not we should take that other firm over. Don't mention it to anybody for the time being.

Best wishes and write to us again soon. Anna is learning to appreciate paintings and has quite a good eye, admiring Boughton, Maris and Jacquet already, for instance, so that is a good start. Entre nous, I think we are going to have a difficult time finding something for her, they say everywhere that she is too young, and they required German, too, but be that as it may, she certainly has a better chances here than in Holland. Goodbye,

Vincent

You can imagine how delighted I am to be here together with Anna. Tell H. T. [Herman Tersteeg] that the pictures have duly arrived and that I shall be writing to him soon.





24. *Girl in a Wood*,  
The Hague, August 1882.  
Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 39 x 59 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



25. *Lane with Poplars*,  
Nuenen, November 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 78 x 98.5 cm.  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, 10 August 1874**

Dear Theo,

“Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man.”

“He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her.”

So keep to your own ideas, and if you doubt whether they are right, test them with those of Him who dared to say, “I am the truth,” or with those of some very human person, Michelet, for instance...

Virginity of soul and impurity of body can go together. You know the “Margaret at the Fountain,” by Ary Scheffer, is there a purer being than that girl “who loved so much”?

“Leys n’est pas un imitateur mais un semblable” [Leys is not an imitator but a pretender] is a true saying that struck me too. One might say the same of Tissot’s pictures, of his “Walk in the Snow,” “Walk on the Ramparts,” “Marguerite in Church,” etc.

With the money I gave you, you must buy Alphonse Karr’s *Voyage autour de mon jardin*. Be sure to do that - I want you to read it.

Anna and I walk every evening. Autumn is coming fast and that makes nature more serious and more intimate still. We are going to move to a house quite covered in ivy; I will soon write more from there. Compliments to anyone who may inquire after me.

Vincent

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**London, February 1875**

Dear Theo,

I have quite filled your little book 1, and I think it turned out well. When you have a chance, send me “La Falaise” [The Cliff] by Jules Breton.

Our gallery is ready now and is very beautiful, we have some splendid pictures: Jules Dupré, Michel, Daubigny, Maris, Israëls, Mauve, Bisschop, etc. In April we are going to have an exhibition. Mr. Boussod has promised

to send us the best things available: “La Malaria” by Hébert, “La Falaise” by Jules Breton, etc.

How I should like to have you here - we must manage that someday. How I should love to show you my room! There is a beautiful exhibition of old art here, including: a large “Descent from the Cross” by Rembrandt;

five large figures in twilight - you can imagine the sentiment; five Ruysdaels; one Frans Hals; Van Dijck; a landscape with figures by Rubens; “Autumn Evening” by Titian; two portraits by Tintoretto; and some beautiful old English art

Reynolds, Romney, and a splendid Old Crome landscape.

Adieu. I shall send you your little book at the first opportunity. Write soon.

Vincent

### **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh Paris, 31 May 1875**

Dear Theo,

Thanks for the letter I received this morning. Yesterday I saw the Corot exhibition. In it was the picture, “The Garden of Olives”; I am glad he painted that. To the right, a group of olive trees, dark against the glimmering blue sky; in the background, hills covered with shrubs and a few large ivy-grown trees over which the evening star shines.

At the Salon there are three very fine Corots; the best of them, painted shortly before his death, “Les Bûcheronnes” [female woodcutters], will probably be reproduced as a woodcut in L’Illustration or Le Monde Illustré.

Of course I have also been to the Louvre and the Luxembourg. The Ruysdaels at the Louvre are splendid, especially “Le Buisson,” “L’Estacade,” and “Le Coup de Soleil.” I wish you could see the little Rembrandts there, “The Men of Emmaus” and its counterpart, “The Philosophers.”

Some time ago I saw Jules Breton with his wife and two daughters. His figure reminded me of J. Maris, but he had dark hair. As soon as there is an opportunity I will send you a book of his, *Les Champs et la Mer*, which contains all his poems. He has a beautiful picture at the Salon, “St. John’s

Eve.” Peasant girls dancing on a summer evening around a St. John’s fire; in the background, the village with a church and the moon over it.

Dansez, dansez, oh jeunes filles, [Dance, Dance, oh young ladies]

En chantant vos chansons d’amour, [Singing your love songs,]

Demain pour courir aux faucilles, [Tomorrow to go to your sickles,]

Vous sortiez au petit jour. [You will go to the break of dawn.]

There are now three pictures of his at the Luxembourg: “A Procession among the Cornfields,” “Women Gleaning” and “Alone.” Adieu.

Vincent



26. *The Edge of a Wood*,  
The Hague, August-September 1883.  
Oil on canvas mounted on panel, 34.5 x 49 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



27. *Birds' Nests*,  
Nuenen, late September-early October 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 33 x 42 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Paris, 15 July 1875**

Dear Theo,

Our Uncle Vincent visited us here; I saw him often and talked about a heap of things with him. I asked him if he saw any chance of getting you a place in the store in Paris.

At first he wouldn't hear of it, saying that you were too valuable in The Hague. Then, after I insisted, he said he would think about it.

He will certainly come to see you while he is in The Hague; he is not going to change from his dullness, let him say what he wants, it will do no harm to you, and won't do you any harm when you need something in the future. Don't talk of me unless you need something.

He is very, very clever. When I was here last winter, one of the things he said to me was, "Supernatural things I may not know, but I know everything about natural things." I do not know if those were his exact words, but that was the meaning.

I can also tell you that one of his favourite pictures is "Lost Illusions" by Gleyre.

Sainte-Beuve said, "In most men there exists a poet who died young, whom the man survived." And Musset said, "Know that often a dormant poet is hidden within us, always young and alive." I think Uncle Vincent belongs to the first group. So you know whom you are dealing with. Ask him squarely if he can arrange for you to have authority here or in London.

Thank you for your letter that came this morning and the poem by Rückert. Do you have a copy of his poems? I would love to get to know them. As soon as I have a chance, I shall send you a French Bible, and The Imitation of Christ. It was probably the favourite book of that lady painted by Ph. de Champaigne. There is a portrait of her daughter, a nun, in The Louvre, also by Ph. de Ch. She has l'Imitation on the chair beside her.

Father wrote to me once: "You know that the same mouth which said: 'Be as harmless as the doves' straight away added: and as wise as a serpent.'" [Matt. 10:16] Keep that in mind and believe me always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Do you have the photographs after Meissonier in the gallery? Look at them often; he has painted men. You probably know his "Le Fumeur à la

Fenêtre” and “Le jeune Homme Déjeunant.”



28. *Still Life with a Basket of Vegetables*,  
Nuenen, September 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 35.5 x 45 cm.  
Collection of Anneliese Brand, Landsberg am Lech.



29. *Still Life with Vegetables and Fruit*,  
Nuenen, September 1885. Oil on canvas,  
32.5 x 43 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Paris, 17 September 1875**

Dear Theo,

A feeling, even a fine feeling, for the beauties of Nature is not the same as a religious feeling, though I believe these two are connected. \*

Nearly everyone has a feeling for nature, some more, some less, but there are some who feel: God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. Father is one of those few, Mother too, and Uncle Vincent as well, I think.

You know that it is written: "The world passeth away and the lust thereof", and that on the other hand we are also told about "that good part which shall not be taken away", and about a "well of water springing up into everlasting life." Let us also pray that we may grow rich in God. Still, do not dwell too deeply on these matters - in the fullness of time they will become clearer to you of their own accord - and just take the advice I have given you.

Let us ask that it may fall to us to become the poor in the kingdom of God, God's servants. We are still a long way from that, however, since there are often beams in our eye that we know not of. Let us therefore ask that our eye may become single, for then we ourselves shall become wholly single.

Regards to Roos and to anybody who may ask after me, and believe me, always,

Your loving brother, Vincent

You are eating properly, aren't you? In particular eat especially as much bread as you can. Sleep well, I must go and polish my boots for tomorrow.

\*The same is true of the feeling for art. Do not succumb too much to that either. Above all, save some love for the business and for your work, and respect for Mr. Tersteeg. One day you will appreciate, better than now, how much he deserves it. No need to overdo it, though.





30. *Still Life with a Basket of Apples*,  
Nuenen, September 1885. Oil on canvas,  
33 x 43.5 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



31. *Woman Shelling Peas*,  
Nuenen, summer 1885. Charcoal, 42 x 26 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Paris, 9 November 1875**

Dear Theo,

It is again time for you to hear from me, but it will only be a short note today; I have not much time, as I am very busy.

Thanks for what you sent me; I am very glad to have it.

I am glad for our parent's sake as well as for yours that you were at Etten on the day of the ordination. You must tell me all about it.

Uncle Vincent and Aunt left again yesterday. I saw quite a bit of them. To my great regret I did not see them off at the station when they left; enclosed is a note for Uncle, telling him how it happened.

We are in autumn; I suppose you go for walks often. Do you rise early? Me, I rise regularly at a good hour, it is an excellent habit to get into; the new day is so delicious, I have learnt to like it. Most of the time, I go to bed at an equally good hour. Every morning my worthy Englishman prepares oatmeal - how I wish you could be here some morning.

I shall write more soon. Write again soon and about everything. With a firm handshake, I am always Your loving brother, Vincent

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Paris, 7 February 1876**

Dear Theo,

Congratulations to you on Father's birthday. That was a beautiful text from you on the 8th of February: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

We ignore what is ahead for our father and for us, but we can leave that to Him whose name is "Our Father" and "I am that I am".

Today, I received a reply from one of my letters; they asked if I am capable of teaching French, German and drawing, and also asked for my photograph. I answered today; as soon as I hear from them again, I will let you know.

Thanks for the little book by Andersen, I am glad to have it. It is to be read aloud to a Dutchman, a fellow employee whom I have seen much of lately.

Yesterday, I went to an Anglican church; I was very happy to attend again an Anglican service, it is very simple and very beautiful. The sermon was on the theme of "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

Many thanks again for the book by Andersen, a handshake and compliments to Roos. I heard from home that Mr. Tersteeg has been at Etten. Ever yours, in haste,

Your loving brother, Vincent

### **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh Etten, c. 4 April 1876**

Dear Theo,

On the morning before I left Paris, I received a letter from a schoolmaster in Ramsgate. He proposed that I go there for a month (without salary). At the end of that time he will decide whether I am fit for the position. You can imagine how happy I am to have found something! I will have in any event board and lodging free.

Yesterday I went with Father to Brussels; we found Uncle Hein in a very sad state. On the train Father and I spoke much about pictures, including the Rembrandts at the Louvre and the portrait of "Burgomaster Six" and particularly about Michel.

Wouldn't there be a chance for Father to see that book about Michel? If the opportunity arises, don't forget it.

I am very happy to have the chance to see you before I leave, and Liesbeth too.

As you know, Ramsgate is a little town by the sea. I saw somewhere that there were 12,000 inhabitants, but I don't know any more about it.

And now till Saturday, a good journey to you. Always

Your loving brother, Vincent

Gladwell saw me off at the station last Friday night. On my birthday he came at half-past six in the morning and brought me a beautiful etching after Chauvel, an autumn landscape with a herd of sheep on a sandy road.



32. *Peasant Woman by the Fireplace*,  
Nuenen, June 1885. Oil on panel,  
29 x 40 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.





33. *The Potato Eaters*,  
Nuenen, April 1885. Oil on canvas, 82 x 114 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



34. *Head of a Peasant*,  
Nuenen, December 1884.  
Oil on canvas, 39.4 x 30.2 cm.  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh  
Isleworth, 8 July 1876**

C/o Jones Esq., Holme Court

Dear Theo,

Your letter and the prints were a delightful surprise; they came this morning while I was busy weeding the potatoes in the garden. Many thanks; both the engravings, “Christus Consolator” and “Remunerator,” are hanging over the desk in my little room. God is righteous, and He will lead all who err onto the right path; you were thinking of that when you wrote, “May this happen, I am erring in many ways, but I don’t despair. Do not be unhappy about your “luxurious” life, as you call it; go quietly on your way. You are more simple-hearted than I am, and probably you will reach your goal quicker and to a greater extent.

Don’t delude yourself about the liberty I have; I am bound in different ways, some even humiliating, and these will become still worse in time; but the words engraved above the image of Christus Consolator, “He has come to proclaim liberty to the captives” are true to this day.

Now I must ask you something. While in The Hague I had lessons from a Bible teacher, Hille, who then lived in the Bagijnestraat. He took great pains over me. Though I didn’t show it, what he told me made an impression on me, and I should like to send him a word and, if possible, do him some small favour. Go and visit him if you have a moment and if you can find his address, and tell him that I have become a schoolmaster and am looking out for some other situation in connection with the church. He is a very simple man who, I think, has had many struggles in life; involuntarily I sometimes thought thus when looking at him: the end of that man will be peace.

And give him the enclosed little drawing from me.

How I should like to have a glimpse of Mauve’s place; I can see distinctly what you described seeing that evening you were there.

Write again soon, best wishes, believe me always, Your loving brother,  
Vincent

Give my kind regards to Mr. Tersteeg and his wife and Betsy, and the Roos family, and to other friends if you see them. But do not speak about me. As you see, I landed in that other school after all; enclosed you will find

two prospectuses. If you can recommend the school to anybody who wants to send his boy to England, please do.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Isleworth, 13 October 1876**

Dear Mother and Theo,

Tomorrow the boys go home, and then I shall receive my money. I asked Mr. Jones to let me go to you those three days; my heart is so with you. It depends now on you both - if you say that I may come, Mr. Jones will let me go. Besides longing to sit at Theo's bedside, I should like so much to see my mother again and, if possible, also go to Etten to see Father and speak with him. It would only be for a short time; I should be with you but for one or two days.

Monday last, I was again in Richmond, and my subject was, "He has sent me to preach the Gospel to the poor"; but whoever wants to preach the Gospel must carry it in his own heart first. Oh! May I find it, for it is only the word spoken in earnestness and from the fullness of the heart that can bear fruit. Perhaps I shall go to London or Lewisham again one of these days.

Just now I gave a German lesson to Mr. Jones's daughters, and after the lesson I told them the story of Andersen's "The Snow Queen."

If you can, let me know by the next mail if I may come; I was so happy over Mother's last letter.

One of these days I hope to visit Mr. Stokes's school. And I shall have to buy a pair of new boots to get myself ready for new wanderings.

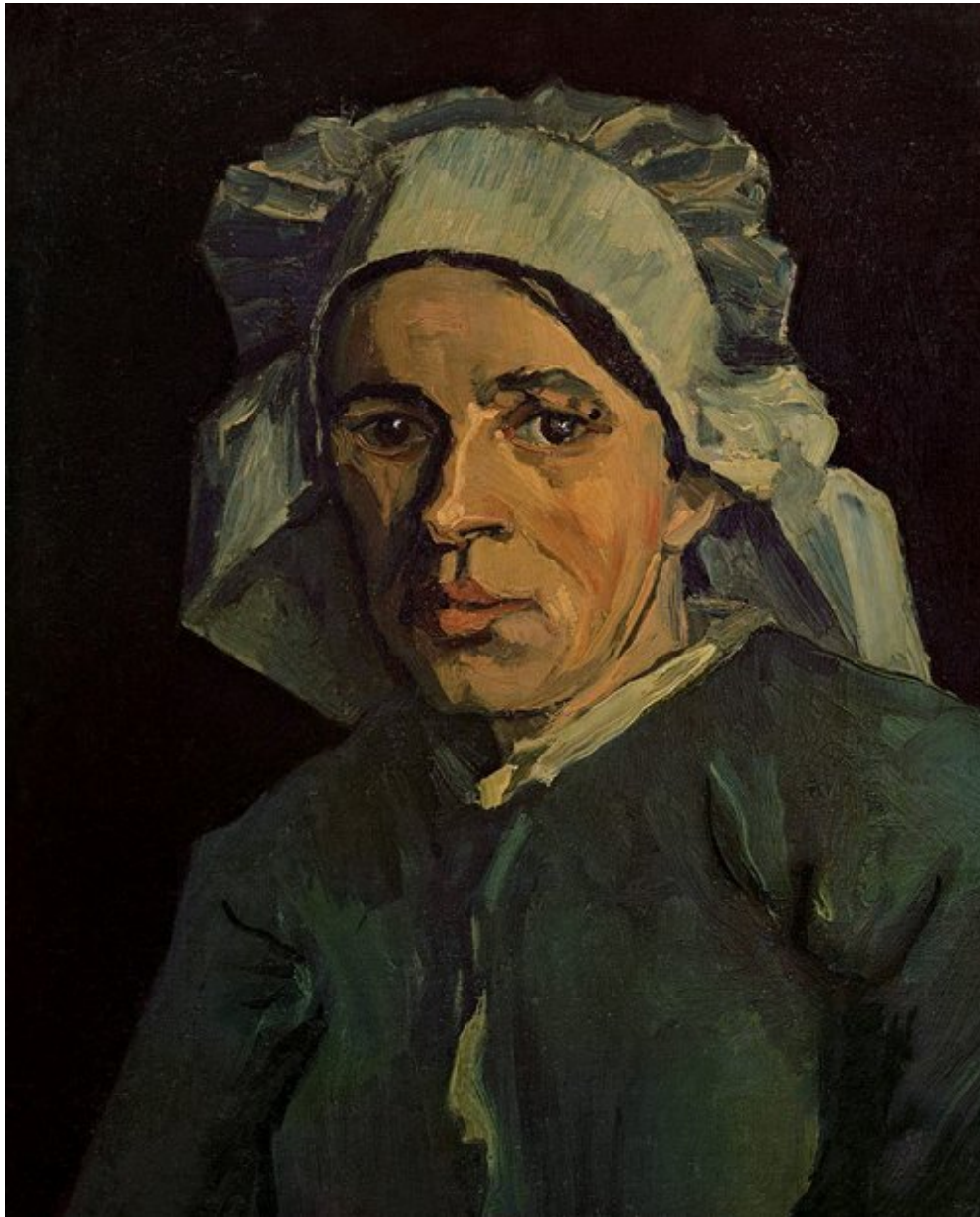
The view from the window of your little room must be fine now - you see, I know it from long ago. We are having a great deal of rain here at present, in Holland I suppose it is the same. At Christmas I shall have a fortnight or three weeks to go to Holland; if Anna can go too, we might come together. And now winter is slowly approaching again - try to be your old self by that time. How welcome is that Christmastime in winter. Oh! my boy, I look forward so much to the time when it will be cold here and I shall have to make my rounds at Turnham Green.

When I think of you as one "who comforts his mother, and who is worthy to be comforted by his mother," I almost envy you. But try to get better soon. Yesterday, I asked Mr. Jones to let me go to Holland, but he would not allow it, and at last he said, "Write to your mother; if she approves, I will too."

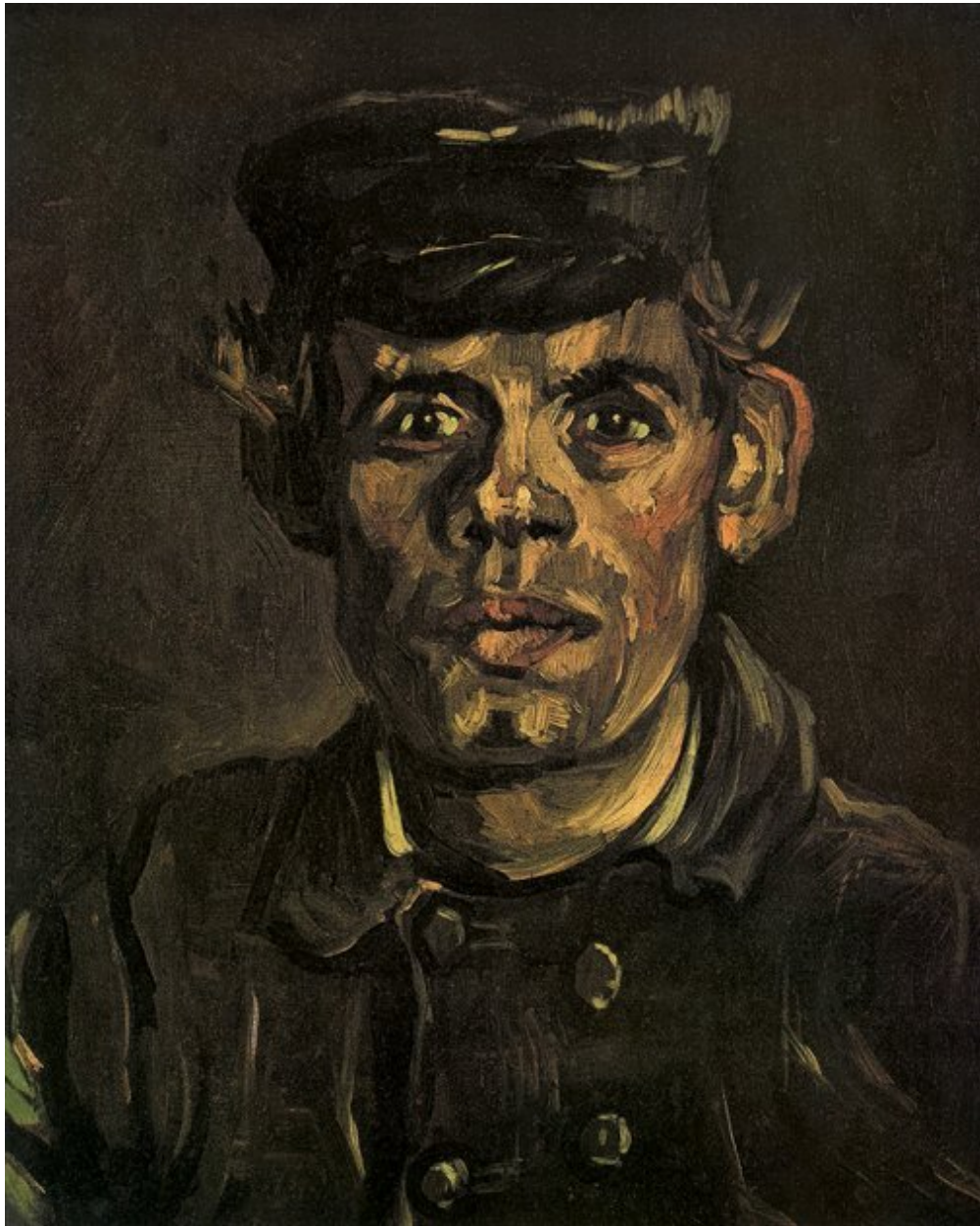
What beautiful poems are De Genestet's [\[14\]](#) "On the Mountains of Sorrow" and "When I Was a Boy."

A handshake for both of you and for the Roos family, and for Willem and any others you see whom I know. And let me hear soon from you again and believe me,

Your loving brother, Vincent



35. *Peasant Woman with a White Bonnet*,  
Nuenen, December 1884.  
Oil on canvas, 42.5 x 34 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



36. *Peasant*,  
Nuenen, March 1885. Oil on canvas, 39 x 30.5 cm.  
Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.





37. *Head of a Woman*,  
Nuenen, April 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 42.5 x 29.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



38. *Woman with a Broom*,  
Nuenen, March-April 1885. Oil on canvas,  
41 x 27 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Isleworth, 10 November 1876**

Dear Theo,

I feel that I must enclose a little note for you. You will spend delightful days at home, I almost envy you, my boy.

What beautiful autumn weather we are having. I think you will see the sun rise in the morning. In which room are you sleeping?

If you can get hold of the Imitation of Christ, you must read it; it is a splendid book which gives much light.

It expresses so well - for he who wrote the book put it into practice himself - how good it is to fight the Holy Strife for duty, and the great joy gained by being charitable and by doing one's duty well.

You must read this letter to Father and Mother. I have taken such beautiful walks lately - they were such a relief after the closeness of the first months here.

It is true that every day has its own evil, and its good, too. But how difficult life must be if it is not strengthened and comforted by faith, especially further on when the evil of each day increases as far as worldly things are concerned. And in Christ all worldly things may become better and, as it were, sanctified.

It is a beautiful saying and happy are those who know it, "Nothing pleaseth me but in Christ, and in Him all things please me." But it is not acquired so easily; still, "seek and ye shall find."

Next time when Father and Mother write, send me a word or two also.

Monday evening I hope to go to Richmond again, and to choose for my text the words: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion." Theo, I shall be unlucky if I cannot preach the Gospel, if my lot is not to preach, if I have not given all my hopes and all my trust to Christ. Well, misery is truly my lot, while what I need now is a little courage in spite of everything.

I should have liked to have you with me last Thursday evening in the little church at Turnham Green. I walked there with the oldest boy in the school, and told him some of Andersen's tales, including "The Story of a Mother."

And now we are slowly approaching winter, and many people dread it. But it is pleasant at Christmastime, which is like moss on the roofs and like

the pine trees, the holly and ivy in the snow! How I should like to meet Anna; I shall write to her again today.

Today, one of the servants left; these women hardly have an easy life here, and she couldn't stand it any longer; everyone, rich or poor, strong or weak, has moments in which he can go no further and when a "ll those things seem against us," when many things that we have built up tumble down. But never despair, Elijah had to pray seven times, and David had ashes on his head many times.

A new assistant has come to the school, for in the future I shall work more at Turnham Green; he has never been away from home before, and it will not be easy for him in the beginning. And now a firm handshake in thought; it is already late, and I am rather tired, best wishes and don't forget

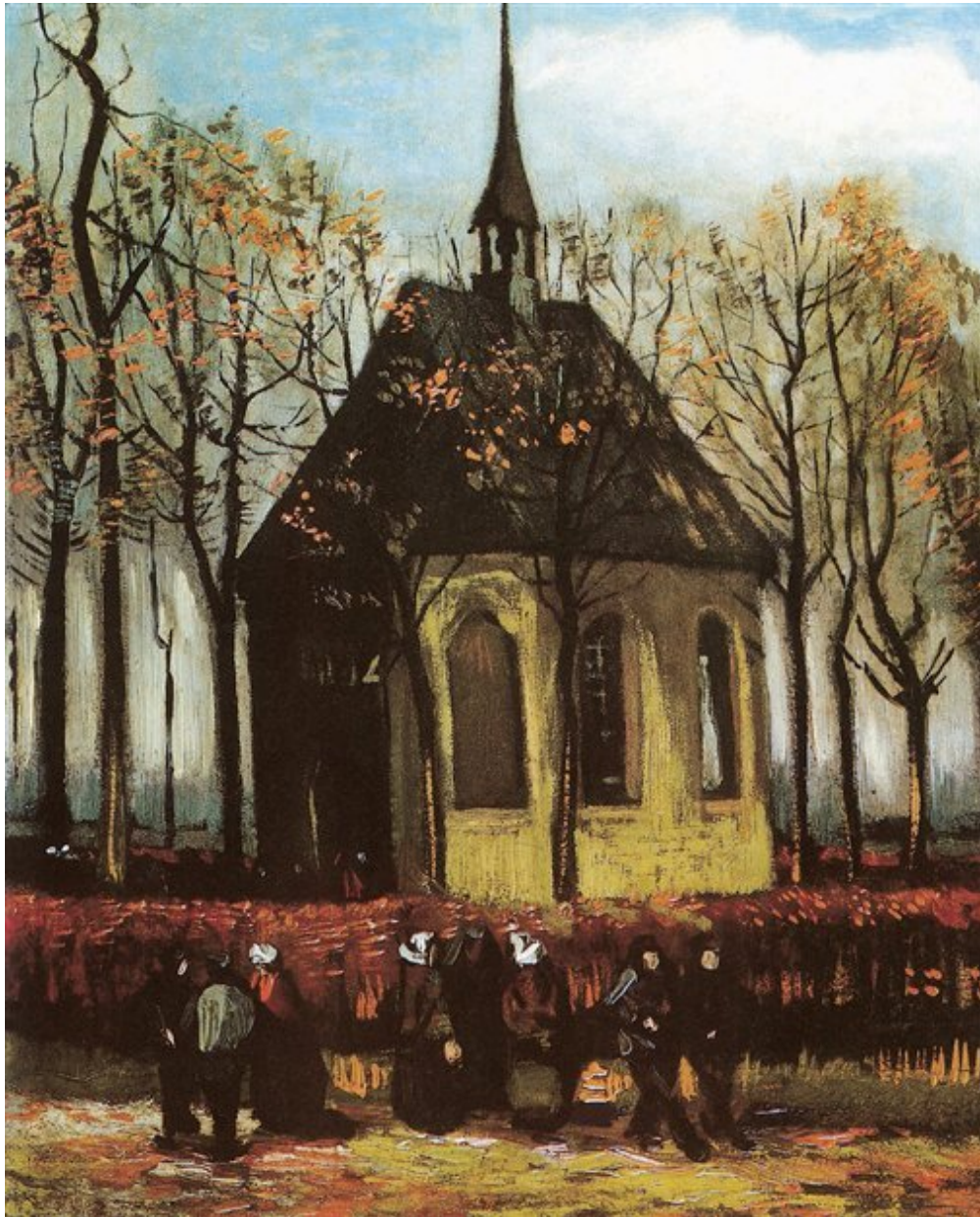
Your most affectionate brother, Vincent.





39. *The Parsonage Garden at Nuenen in the Snow*,  
Nuenen, January 1885. Oil on canvas, 53 x 78 cm.  
The Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles.





40. *Leaving the Church at Nuenen*,  
Nuenen, October 1884. Oil on canvas,  
41.5 x 32 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Dordrecht, 26 February 1877**

Dear Theo,

The hours that we spent together slipped by too quickly. I think of the little path behind the station where we watched the sunset behind the fields and the evening sky reflected in the ditches, where those old trunks covered in moss stand and, in the distance, the little windmill - and I feel I shall often walk there, thinking of you.

I have enclosed a photograph of The Huguenot; hang it in your bedroom. You know the story: the awakening on the day before St. Bartholomew's, a young girl, who knows what is going to happen, forewarned her lover and insisted that he wear the insignia of the Catholics, a white brassard around his arm; his refusal because he feels that his Faith and his duty were stronger than his love for his sweetheart.

I don't remember whether I've already sent you that poem by Longfellow<sup>[15]</sup> of which I'm enclosing a copy now. It has often given me pleasure and will do the same for you. I am glad that we saw the pictures by Scheffer together. That evening I went to see Mager<sup>[16]</sup>, who boards with the sexton of the Lutheran church, in a real old Dutch house; his room is nice. We sat talking together a long time; he told me about Menton and a Christmas he had celebrated there. Thanks for coming this way yesterday. Let us have as few secrets from each other as is possible. That is what brothers are for.

'It is not over yet,' you say. No, it could not be over yet. Your heart will feel the need for confidence in itself; you will be hesitating between two roads: she or my father. As far as I am concerned, I believe that Father loves you more than she does - that his love is more valuable.

Do go there, whenever it becomes too much for you.

A pile of futile tasks has given me a lot of work today; but that is my duty; if one did not have it, very tenaciously have the feeling for it, how would anybody be able to collect one's thoughts at all? The feeling of duty sanctifies and unifies everything, making one large duty out of the many little ones.

Write me soon whether you arrived safely, and whether or not the walk and journey were too much for you. I am anxious for a letter from you, to

hear also if you are going to Etten. A handshake from

Your loving brother, Vincent

This is perhaps a time when you feel the want of a“ Psalm tone from the past, and a plaint from the cross.”

And I seemed to hear in the stillness of the night

His voice so tender and so soft.



41. *The Tower in Nuenen Cemetery*,  
Nuenen, January 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 30 x 41.5 cm.  
Collection of Stavros S. Niarchos, London.





42. *Landscape with Church*,  
Nuenen, April 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 22 x 37 cm.  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Dordrecht, 22 March 1877**

Dear Theo,

I want you to have a letter from me on your journey. What a pleasant day we had together in Amsterdam; I stayed and watched your train until it was out of sight. We are such old friends already - how often haven't we walked the black fields with the young green corn together at Zundert, where at this time of the year we would hear the lark with Father.

This morning I went to Uncle Stricker's with Uncle Cor and had a long talk there on you know what subject. In the evening at half past six Uncle Cor took me to the station. It was a beautiful evening and everything seemed so full of expression, it was still and the streets were a little foggy, as they so often are in London. Uncle had had a toothache in the morning, but luckily it didn't last. We passed the flower market on the way. How right it is to love flowers and the greenery of pines and ivy and hawthorn hedges; they have been with us from the very beginning.

I have written home to tell them what we did in Amsterdam and what we talked about. On arrival here I found a letter from home at the Rijken's. Father was unable to preach last Sunday and the Reverend Mr. Kam stood in for him. I know that his heart burns for something to happen that will allow me to follow in his footsteps, not just some of the way, but all the way. Father has always expected it of me, oh, may it come about and blessings be upon it.

The print you gave me, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," and the portrait of the Reverend Mr. Heldring are already up in my little room, oh, how glad I am to have them, they fill me with hope.

Writing to you about my plans helps me to clarify and settle my thoughts. To begin with, I think of the text, "It is my portion to keep Thy word." I have such a craving to make the treasures of the Bible's word my own, to become thoroughly and lovingly familiar with all those old stories, and above all with everything we know about Christ.

In our family, which is a Christian family in the full sense of the term, there has always been, as far as one can tell, someone from generation to generation who was a preacher of the Gospel. Why should there not be a

member of our family even now who feels called to that ministry, and who has some reason to suppose that he may, and must, declare himself and look for means of attaining that end? It is my prayer and fervent desire that the spirit of my Father and Grandfather may rest upon me, that it may be granted me to become a Christian and a Christian labourer, that my life may come to resemble, the more the better, those of the people I have mentioned above - for behold, the old wine is good and I do not desire new. Let their God be my God and their people my people, let it be my lot to come to know Christ in His full worth and to be impelled by His charity.

It is so beautifully put in the text, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," what that charity is, and in Cor. 13 she "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth."

My heart is filled today with the text about those on the way to Emmaus, when it was toward evening and the sun was going down: "But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us."

It is dear to you, too, that "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," keep it in mind, for it is a good text and a good cloak to wear in the storm of life, keep it in mind at this time now that you have been going through so much. And be careful, for though what you have been through is no small thing, yet as far as I can see there is something still greater ahead, and you too will be put in mind of the Lord's word: I have loved you with an everlasting Love, as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. I shall comfort you as one who comforteth his Mother. I shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth. I will make a new covenant with you. Depart, touch no unclean thing, and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God. And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters. Hate the evil and the places where it is rife, it draws you with its false splendour and will tempt you as the devil tried to tempt Christ by showing Him a "ll the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them"; and saying, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." There is something better than the glory of the things of this world, namely the feeling when our heart burns within us upon hearing His word, faith in God, love of Christ, belief in immortality, in the life hereafter.

Hold on to what you have, Theo, my boy, brother whom I love, I long so fervently for the goal you know of, but how can I attain it? If only everything were already behind me, as it is behind Father, but it takes so much hard work to become a Christian labourer and a preacher of the Gospel

and a sower of the Word. You see, Father can count his religious services and Bible readings and visits to the sick and the poor and his written sermons by the thousand, and yet he does not look back, but carries on doing good.

Cast your eye up on high and ask that it be granted to me, as I ask it for you. May He grant your heart's desire, He who knows us better than we know ourselves, and is above prayer and above thought, since His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts, as high as Heaven is above earth. And may the thought of Christ as a Comforter and of God as a lofty dwelling be with you.

Best wishes on your journey, write soon and accept a handshake in my thoughts. Goodbye, and believe me, always

Your loving brother, Vincent

I hope Father will soon be better. Try to be in Etten at Easter, it will be so good to be together again.

It may be said of many things in the past, and also of what you have been through: "Thou shalt find it after many days."



43. *Carpenter's Yard and Laundry*,  
The Hague, May 1882.  
Pencil, pen and brush in black ink,  
grey wash, white opaque watercolour and  
traces of squaring on laid paper,  
28.5 x 47 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





44. *The Quayside at Antwerp*,  
Antwerp, December 1885. Oil on wood,  
20.5 x 27 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





45. *View of the Sea at Scheveningen*,  
The Hague, August 1882. Oil on canvas,  
34.5 x 51 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



46. *Head of a Fisherman with a Sou'wester*,  
The Hague, January 1883.  
Pencil, black lithographic crayon,  
white chalk, brush in black ink, watercolour,

grey washed, scratched, on watercolour paper,  
50.5 x 31.6 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

## **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**

### **Petit-Wasmes, April 1879**

Dear Theo,

It is time that you heard from me again. From home I heard that you had been in Etten for a few days and that you were on a business trip. I certainly hope you had a good journey. I suppose you will be in the dunes some of these days and occasionally in Scheveningen. It is lovely here in spring, too; there are spots where one could almost fancy oneself in the dunes, because of the hills.

Not long ago I made a very interesting expedition, spending six hours in a mine. It was Marcasse, one of the oldest and most dangerous mines in the neighbourhood. It has a bad reputation because many perish in it, either going down or coming up, or through poisoned air, firedamp explosion, water seepage, cave-ins, etc. It is a gloomy spot, and at first everything around looks dreary and desolate.

Most of the miners are thin and pale from fever; they look tired and emaciated, weather-beaten and aged before their time. On the whole the women are faded and worn. Around the mine are poor miners' huts, a few dead trees black from smoke, thorn hedges, dunghills, ash dumps, heaps of useless coal, etc. Mans could make a wonderful picture of it.

I will try to make a little sketch of it presently to give you an idea of how it looks.

I had a good guide, a man who has already worked there for thirty-three years; kind and patient, he explained everything well and tried to make it clear to me.

So together we went down 700 meters and explored the most hidden corners of that underworld. The maintenages or gredins [cells where the miners work] which are situated farthest from the exit are called des caches [hiding places, places where men search].

This mine has five levels, but the three upper ones have been exhausted and abandoned; they are no longer worked because there is no more coal. A picture of the maintenages would be something new and unheard of - or rather, never before seen. Imagine a row of cells in a rather narrow, low passage, shored up with rough timber.

In each of those cells a miner in a coarse linen suit, filthy and black as a chimney sweep, is busy hewing coal by the pale light of a small lamp. The miner can stand erect in some cells; in others, he lies on the ground. The arrangement is more or less like the cells in a beehive, or like a dark, gloomy passage in an underground prison, or like a row of small weaving looms, or rather more like a row of baking ovens such as the peasants have, or like the partitions in a crypt. The tunnels themselves are like the big chimneys of the Brabant farms.





47. *Head of a Fisherman with a  
Fringe of Beard and a Sou'wester,*  
The Hague, February 1883.  
Lead, white and black pencils with ink,

47.2 x 29.4 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





48. *Fisherman with a Sou'wester, Head*,  
The Hague, February 1883.  
Lead pencil and pen, heightened with  
opaque watercolour, 43 x 25 cm.

Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



The water leaks through in some, and the light of the miner's lamp makes a curious effect, reflected as in a stalactite cave. Some of the miners work in the maintenages, others load the cut coal into small carts that run on rails, like a street-car. This is mostly done by children, boys as well as girls. There is also a stable yard down there, 700 metres underground, with about seven old horses which pull a great many of those carts to the so-called accrochage, the place from which they are pulled up to the surface. Other miners repair the old galleries to prevent their collapse or make new galleries in the coal vein. As the mariners ashore are homesick for the sea, notwithstanding all the dangers and hardships which threaten them, so the miner would rather be under the ground than above it. The villages here look desolate and dead and forsaken; life goes on underground instead of above. One might live here for years and never know the real state of things unless one went down in the mines.

People here are very ignorant and untaught - most of them cannot read - but at the same time they are intelligent and quick at their difficult work; brave and frank, they are short but square-shouldered, with melancholy deep-set eyes. They are skillful at many things, and work terribly hard. They have a nervous temperament - I do not mean weak, but very sensitive. They have an innate, deep-rooted hatred and a strong mistrust of anyone who is domineering. With miners one must have a miner's character and temperament, and no pretentious pride or mastery, or one will never get along with them or gain their confidence.

Did I tell you at the time about the miner who was badly hurt by a firedamp explosion? Thank God, he has recovered and is going out again, and is beginning to walk some distance just for exercise; his hands are still weak and it will be some time before he can use them for his work, but he is out of danger. Since that time there have been many cases of typhoid and malignant fever, of what they call la sotte fièvre, which gives them bad dreams like nightmares and makes them delirious. So again there are many sickly and bedridden people - emaciated, weak, and miserable.



49. *The State Lottery*,  
The Hague, September 1882.  
Watercolour, 38 x 57 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





50. *Loom with Weaver*,  
Nuenen, April-May 1884.  
Oil on canvas, 70 x 85 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

In one house they are all ill with fever and have little or no help, so that the patients have to nurse the patients. “Ici c’est les malades qui soignent les malades” [here the sick tend the sick], said a woman, like, “Le pauvre est l’ami du pauvre.” [The poor man is the poor man’s friend.]

Have you seen any beautiful pictures lately? I am eager for a letter from you. Has Israël done much lately, and Maris and Mauve?

A few days ago a colt was born here in the stable, a pretty little animal that soon stood firm on his legs. The miners keep many goats here, and there are kids in every house; rabbits are also very common here in the miners’ houses.

I must go out to visit some patients, so I must finish. When you have time, let me have a word from you soon, as a sign of life. My compliments to the Roos family, and to Mauve when you meet him. Many good wishes, with a handshake in thought,

Your loving brother, Vincent

Going down into a mine is a very unpleasant sensation. One goes in a kind of basket or cage, like a bucket in a well, but in a well from 500 - 700 meters deep, so that when looking upward from the bottom, the daylight is about the size of a star in the sky.

It feels like being on a ship at sea for the first time, but it is worse; fortunately it does not last long. The miners get used to it, yet they keep an unconquerable feeling of horror and fear, which reasonably and justifiably stays with them.

But once down, the worst is over, and one is richly rewarded for the trouble by what one sees.

My address is - Vincent van Gogh, c/o Jean Baptiste Denis,  
Rue de petit Wasmes,  
Wasmes (Borinage, Hainaut)





51. *The Weaver*,  
Nuenen, January 1884. Ink heightened with  
opaque watercolour and tinted brown, 26 x 21 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



52. *The Weaver*,  
Nuenen, February 1884. Oil on canvas,  
37 x 45 cm. Christie's, London.

## **Letters from his Parents to Theo van Gogh Zundert, 1879**

### **From Reverend van Gogh to Theo 20 January 1879**

We are glad to be able to tell you that Vincent has been accepted for the evangelisation in the Borinage - provisionally for six months. He gets fifty francs a month - surely not much, but his boarding house costs him thirty francs. It seems he works there with success and ambition, and his letters are really interesting. He devotes himself to that job with all his heart and an eye for the needs of those people. It is certainly remarkable what he writes; he went down, for instance, in a mine, 635 meters.

### **From Reverend van Gogh to Theo 12 February 1879**

We are beginning to worry about him again. I am afraid he is wholly absorbed by the care for the sick and the wounded and sitting up with them.

... He also spoke about a plan of renting a workman's house and living there alone. We have tried to dissuade him from it. We are afraid he would not keep it in good shape and it would again lead to eccentricities.

### **From Mrs van Gogh to Theo 27 February 1879**

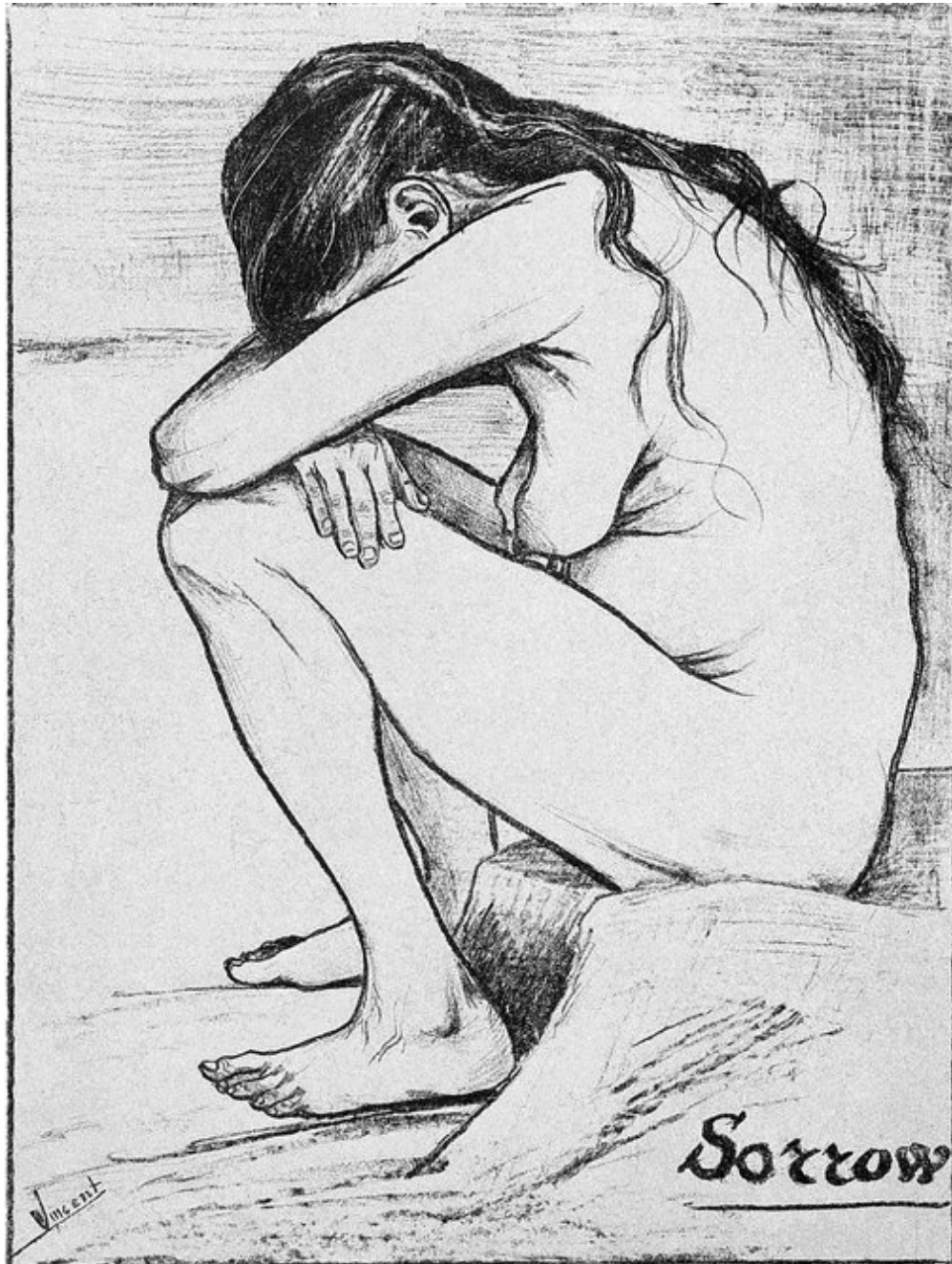
Verhaegen, a colporteur, to whom Pa also sent his letters in the beginning, where Vincent had been lovingly received during the first eight days; he was the one who had found that good boarding house at Denis.

... And now I have to tell you that Pa has gone to Vincent this week. We were worried about all the bad weather he had, and especially because while I was away there had been a very unpleasant letter from him, confirming what we had already suspected, that he had no bed, and that there was nobody to watch his things but far from complaining he said that that was nobody's concern, etc. We were preparing a parcel for him, but we both thought that it would be so much better if Pa himself could take it to him.



53. *Woman Seated*,  
The Hague, early May 1882.  
Pencil, pen and brush in ink (diluted),  
wash, traces of squaring, on laid paper (two sheets), 58 x 43 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





54. *Sorrow*,  
The Hague, November 1882. Lithograph,  
38.9 x 29.2 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Mrs van Gogh to Theo.**

**May 1879**

Vincent wrote that he would do his best to draw costumes and tools.

**Mrs van Gogh to Theo.**

**2 July 1879**

This week a letter from Vincent; we are always thinking about him with anxiety; poor boy, shortly after my visit to him he wrote that he had such a melancholy feeling when we said goodbye, as if it could have been for the first, but also for the last time. But now there has been a meeting, but that they hadn't said anything to him; before, they had always found fault with him. We have the idea they still want to wait and see for some time, but if he doesn't suit himself to their wishes and adopt the behavior they demand of him, they can't accept him. He could still achieve so much, if only he knew how to control himself. Poor boy, what a difficult, unrewarding, much missing young life, and what is he going to do next?

**Reverend van Gogh to Theo.**

**19 July 1879**

You know, don't you, that Vincent's situation in Wasmès does not become any clearer. They have given him three months to look for something else. He does not comply with the wishes of the Committee and it seems that nothing can be done about it. It is a bitter trial for us. We literally don't know what to do. There is so much good in him, but he simply doesn't want to cooperate.

**Reverend van Gogh to Theo.**

**7 August 1879**

Last Friday [25 July], Vincent writes, he started on a trip to Maria Hoorebeeke in Flanders; he arrived there - on foot - on Sunday afternoon, intending to meet the Reverend Pietersen, who was in Brussels. Thereupon he went to that city, and he met him on Monday morning. After consultation with him, he is now in Cuesmes again, where he has found shelter; he hopes to find a small room there to stay for the time being. At present his address is: Chez M. Frank, Evangéliste À Cuesmes (près de Mons) au Marais. In Brussels, he visited the families he had met there earlier - what impression will he have made?

**From Mrs Van Gogh to Theo**

**19 August 1879**

But now I must tell you something new, which is that Vincent, after much pressure from our side to visit us at home because we were worrying so much about him and he had nothing to do there, suddenly stood before us last Friday [August 15th]. The girls were boating with the Gezink family, and all at once we hear, "Hello father, hello mother," and there he was. We were glad; although seeing him again we found he looked thin; that is over now; it must have been the walking and bad food etc. - things, by the way, he does not talk about, but he looks well, except for his clothes. Pa immediately gave him his cherished new jacket. We bought him a pair of boots, and he now wears the little summer coat that I made for Pa's birthday every day. Some of your old underwear came in useful too, and as far as stockings, etc., are concerned, I had prepared them in advance, so that now he is quite well taken care of. He is reading books by Dickens all day long, and does not speak apart from giving answers - sometimes correct, sometimes strange ones; if only he adopted the good things from these books. For the rest, about his work, about the past or the future, not a word... Tomorrow he and Pa will go to Prinsenhage, where CM's boys will come to see the paintings; they are going by train. Pa and Vincent will go on foot, maybe he will talk a little bit then.

**From Reverend van Gogh to Theo**

**11 March 1880**

Vincent is still here - but alas! It is nothing but worry.

Now he is talking about going to London in order to speak with the Reverend Jones. If he sticks to that plan, I'll enable him to go, but it is hopeless.

**From Reverend van Gogh to Theo**

**5 July 1880**

Indeed that letter Vincent wrote to you gave me some pleasure. But oh! What will become of him, and isn't it insane to choose a life of poverty and let time pass by without looking for an occasion of earning one's own bread - yes, that really is insane. But we have to put up with it. None of all the things we tried has helped in any way. Maybe you should write back to him; in the last days of June I sent him 60 francs, which he acknowledged; some time later we sent him some clothes. Thinking of him always hurts, and we do think so continuously of him.

[Lines added by Mrs van Gogh] We can agree with what you write about Vincent, but if reading books gives such practical results, can it then be

called right? And for the rest, what kind of ideas his reading gives him.

He sent us a book by Victor Hugo, but that man takes the side of the criminals and doesn't call bad what really is bad. What would the world look like if one calls the evil good? Even with the best of intentions that cannot be accepted. Did you answer him? If not, do so in any case; we were so glad that he thought of you, and we were so sad that he didn't want to have anything to do with anybody when he was here. We haven't heard from him for a long time now and shall write to him again.





55. *Head of a Woman*,  
Antwerp, December 1885. Oil on canvas,  
35 x 24 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



56. *Peasant Woman, Seated with a White Cap*,  
Nuenen, December 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 36 x 26 cm. Private Collection.



## Holland, England and Belgium: 1853-1886

### ***“Feeling nowhere so much myself a stranger as in my family and country...”***

On March 30th, 1852, a dead son was born at the vicarage of Zundert, but a year later on the same date, Anna van Gogh gave birth to a healthy boy.<sup>[17]</sup> Pastor Theodorus van Gogh gave his second-born son the same name as the first: Vincent. When the second Vincent walked to his father's church to attend services, he passed by the grave where 'his' name was written on a tombstone. In the last months of his life, van Gogh reminisced about the places of his childhood and often wistfully mentioned the graveyard of Zundert.

Very little is known about van Gogh as a child. A neighbour's daughter described him as "kind-hearted, friendly, good, pitiful,"<sup>[18]</sup> while a former servant girl of the family reported "Vincent had 'oarige' (funny, meaning unpleasantly eccentric) manners, and that he was often punished accordingly."<sup>[19]</sup> Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, who met her brother-in-law only a few times near the end of his life, also described him as a difficult, naughty, and obstinate child who had been spoiled by over-indulgent parents.<sup>[20]</sup> Similar inconsistencies appear in descriptions of van Gogh as an adult. Most of the descriptions were collected at the beginning of the 20th century by van Gogh-Bonger who took charge of van Gogh's assets after Theo's death in 1891. These accounts are somewhat dubious not only because of the distance of time, but also because the dead painter was by then already a figure of legend.

In general, van Gogh was kind and compassionate toward the poor and the sick, as well as to children. Another important trait that emerged early on, according to the artist's sister Elisabeth Huberta, was his close relation to nature: "He knew the places where the rarest flowers bloomed... as regards birds, he knew exactly where each nested or lived, and if he saw a pair of larks descend in the rye field, he knew how to approach their nest without snapping the surrounding blades or harming the birds in the least."<sup>[21]</sup> In his last years, van Gogh returned to the landscapes of his childhood through painting. "The whole south, everything became Holland for him,"<sup>[22]</sup> said Paul Gauguin of the paintings van Gogh made in Arles. In a letter to Emile Bernard, van Gogh compared the heath and flat landscape of the Carmargue with Holland.

While staying in the mental hospital of Saint-Rémy he wrote to Theo:

"During my illness I saw again every room in the house at Zundert, every path, every plant in the garden, the views of the fields outside, the neighbours, the graveyard, the church, our kitchen garden at the back – down to a magpie's nest in a tall acacia in the graveyard."<sup>[23]</sup>

The references to nests made by both Elisabeth Huberta and by van Gogh himself suggests the extent of the importance of this image for the painter. The nest is a symbol of safety, which may explain why he called houses "human nests."<sup>[24]</sup> Van Gogh had to leave his first nest – his parents' home – at the

age of eleven. It is not clear why the elder van Gogh decided to send his son to a boarding school in Zevenbergen, some thirty kilometers from Zundert. Perhaps there was no Protestant school nearby; the neighbourhood of Zundert was almost entirely Catholic. On the other hand, perhaps the parents' nest had simply become too small with the arrival of four more children.

"It was an autumn day when I stood on the steps before Mr. Provily's school, watching the carriage in which Pa and Ma were driving home. One could see the little yellow carriage far down the road – wet with rain and with spare trees on either side – running through the meadows."<sup>[25]</sup> A few weeks before his death, van Gogh painted his memory of this farewell: a two-wheel carriage rolling through fields on a narrow path. At the age of thirteen, Vincent went to a higher school in Tilburg, where the landscape painter Constantijn C. Huysmans taught him drawing. Only one of van Gogh's school works has been preserved: a page with two views of a back. In all, about a dozen of van Gogh's childhood drawings and paintings have survived. On one occasion, according to van Gogh-Bonger, the eight-year-old "had modelled a little clay elephant that drew his parents' attention, but he destroyed it at once when, according to his notion, such a fuss was made about it."<sup>[26]</sup> During his stay in Tilburg the first of two known photographs of young van Gogh was taken. It shows a soft, boyish face with very light eyes. The second portrait shows van Gogh as an earnest 19-year-old. By then, he had already been at work for three years in The Hague, at the gallery of Goupil & Co, where one of van Gogh's uncles was a partner. Vincent reports that of the three and half years he spent in The Hague, "The first two were rather unpleasant, but the last one was much happier."<sup>[27]</sup> Van Gogh's master at Goupil's was the 24-year-old Hermanus Gijsbertus Tersteeg, of whom the artist wrote: "I knew him during a very peculiar period of his life, when he had just 'worked his way up,' as the saying goes, and was newly married besides. He made a very strong impression on me then – he was a practical man, extremely clever and cheerful, energetic in both small and large undertakings; besides, there was real poetry, of the true unsentimental kind, in him. I felt such respect for him then that I always kept at a distance, and considered him a being of a higher order than myself."<sup>[28]</sup>

Later, when van Gogh had begun his career as a painter, he would continue struggling – always in vain – to win the respect of the highly regarded dealer. During his apprenticeship, van Gogh came into contact with the paintings of the salons and of the school of Barbizon, whose most distinguished representative, Jean-François Millet (1814–1875), became one of the most influential figures for the painter. As Goupil & Co. also sold prints the trainee saw reproductions of many masterpieces. Here, van Gogh built his new nest: the gallery, and later the museums, became his "land of pictures."<sup>[29]</sup>

In August 1872, Theo came to see his elder brother in The Hague. During this meeting the two young men, then 19 and 15 years old, became closer, in the way that changes relatives into friends. Thereafter, Vincent regarded Theo as his alter ego. Since the brothers lived most of the time in different cities – with the exception of the two years during which they shared a flat in Paris – they communicated through letters: they discussed art, argued about family problems, and gave one another advice about their illnesses and love affairs. Vincent wrote more than 600 letters in 18 years to his brother, who collected them faithfully. Most of these were published after van Gogh's death. Roughly 40 of Theo's letters to Vincent survived. The others were the casualties of Vincent's frequent relocations, in which a large number of drawings and paintings were also lost.

"What pleasant days we spent together at The Hague; I think so often of that walk on the Rijswijk road, when we drank milk at the mill after the rain,"<sup>[30]</sup>



van Gogh recalled wistfully in the summer of 1873. By then his training had come to an end, and the young man found himself working for Goupil's in London:

“The business here is only a stockroom, and our work is quite different from that in The Hague, but I shall probably get used to it. At six o'clock my work is already done for the day, so that I have a nice bit of time for myself, which I spend pleasantly – taking walks, reading and letter-writing.”[\[31\]](#)



57. *Portrait of a Woman in Blue*,  
Antwerp, December 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 38.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

Van Gogh forgets to write about another activity in his spare time: drawing. Ten years later, just as he was about to become an artist, he remembered:

“In London how often I stood drawing on the Thames Embankment, on my way home from Southampton Street in the evening, and it came to nothing.”[\[32\]](#)

His favorite reading in London was *L'Amour* by Jules Michelet:

“To me the book has been both a revelation and a Gospel at the same time... And that man and wife can be one, that is to say, one whole and not two halves, yes, I believe that too.”[\[33\]](#)

When van Gogh wrote these sentences at the end of July, 1874, he had every hope that his revelation would be fulfilled. However, his love for Ursula Loyer, the daughter of his landlady, ended in disaster. Seven years later van Gogh summed up the events:

“I gave up a girl and she married another, and I went away, far from her, but kept her in my thoughts always. Fatal.”[\[34\]](#)

This representation of the facts is dubious, at best: Ursula was already engaged when van Gogh met her, and it was not his decision to leave London; in May, 1875, he was transferred to Paris – against his will. By this time, van Gogh had already given up his Gospel of earthly love and turned instead to the love of God. His religious enthusiasm was perhaps one reason why he had to leave Goupil's in London. The business, moved into a bigger house, was no longer just a stockroom but a public gallery and the solitary, eccentric van Gogh had difficulty pleasing the clientele. His family may also have wanted to end his “affair” with Ursula. Van Gogh himself suspected his father and uncle of being behind the transfer. He retaliated with silence – a weapon that he came to rely on quite often in conflicts.

Theo, who took Vincent's place in Goupil's office in The Hague, thus became the only member of the family with whom van Gogh maintained contact. The brothers continued to exchange their opinions about art. Vincent wrote often of his visits to the Louvre, and in particular, of his passion for the paintings of Ruysdael and Rembrandt. Above all else, van Gogh was an enthusiast, not a dealer, and he had little patience for the paintings he was supposed to sell at Goupil's. His parents were informed of his failure in the business. When Vincent came home for Christmas in 1875 – clearly without having obtained permission to leave the gallery during the busiest time of the year – his father suggested that he resign. By then it was already too late, and the gallery manager dismissed van Gogh immediately after his return to Paris. Van Gogh decided not to return to Holland, but to England. He found work as an assistant teacher in Ramsgate, and later as an assistant preacher in Isleworth.



58. *Head of a Woman*,  
The Hague, December 1882.  
Lead pencil, black pencil and white chalk,  
50.1 x 28 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





59. *Head of a Woman*,  
The Hague, December 1882.  
Lead pencil, ink and black pencil, 47.6 x 26.3 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

In October 1876, when he gave his first sermon. The central thesis was: “We are pilgrims on the earth and strangers – we come from afar and we are going far.”<sup>[35]</sup> When he returned to Holland to join his family for Christmas, his parents had already decided to change the direction of his life journey, by steering him into the bookstore of Pieter Kornelius Braat in Dordrecht.

Vincent accepted and took a position in the accounting department of the shop, but his Bible studies continued to be his main interest. On his first Sunday in Dordrecht, van Gogh went to church twice to listen to a sermon about this verse from the first epistle to the Corinthians: “Now we look through a mirror into a dark reason, now I only know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known myself.”<sup>[36]</sup> In his letters to Theo, van Gogh referred to this sentence obliquely:

“When we meet again, we shall be as good friends as ever; sometimes I feel so delighted that we are again living on the same soil and speaking the same language.”<sup>[37]</sup>

Before leaving Dordrecht in April, 1877 – since he spent most of his nights engrossed in the Bible, he was too sleepy during the day to be of much use in the bookshop – he heard the same sermon again. In a letter to Theo, he wrote:

“After church I walked along the path behind the station where we walked together; my thoughts were full of you, and I wished we might be together.”<sup>[38]</sup>





60. *Head of a Woman*,  
The Hague, January 1883.  
Lead pencil with ink tints, 39.5 x 24.7 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

Van Gogh's understanding of the biblical verse reveals his yearning to be known. This desire persisted through most of his life, manifesting itself in his friendship with Theo, in his love for Ursula Loyer and his cousin Kee, and in his attitudes about religion and art. The common thread in each of these is an intense longing to discover himself through dialogue with others. The mercantile affairs of an art dealer or an accountant offered no such satisfaction. During his stay in Dordrecht, van Gogh finally arrived at a plan for his future: he set out to become a minister. P. C. Görlitz, van Gogh's roommate in this time, wrote of him: "He was totally different from the usual type of man. His face was ugly, his mouth more or less awry, his face was densely covered with freckles, and he had hair of a reddish hue. As I said, his face was ugly, but as soon as he spoke about religion or art, and then became excited, which was sure to happen very soon, his eyes would sparkle, and his features would make a deep impression on me; it wasn't his own face any longer: it had become beautiful...

"When he came back from his office at nine o'clock in the evening, he would immediately light a little wooden pipe; he would take down a big Bible, and sit down to read assiduously, to copy texts and to learn them by heart; he would also write all kinds of religious compositions..." When Sunday came, van Gogh would go to church three times, either to the Roman Catholic church, or to the Protestant or Old Episcopal church, which was commonly called the Jansenist church.

"When once we made the remark. But, my dear van Gogh, how is it possible that you can go to three churches of such divergent creeds?" he said, "Well, in every church I see God, and it's all the same to me whether a Protestant pastor or a Roman Catholic priest preaches; it is not really a matter of dogma, but of the spirit of the Gospel, and I find this spirit in all churches." [39]

After his failure as a businessman, van Gogh hoped that his father would appreciate his decision to follow in his footsteps. But Reverant van Gogh viewed his eldest son's enthusiasm for religion critically: Vincent's belief in the "spirit of the Gospel" deviated from the teachings of the vicar's Church. Nevertheless, he asked his brothers Cornelius and Jan, who lived in Amsterdam, to help the young man. Both uncles agreed to support their nephew: one promised to give him money, the other board and lodging. In May, 1877 van Gogh began to prepare himself for the university. Since he had left school at the age of 15, he had to study mathematics and ancient languages before entering the academy. His language teacher, Mendes da Costa, described his student:

"I succeeded in winning his confidence and friendship very soon, which was so essential in this case, and as his studies were prompted by the best of intentions, we made comparatively good progress at the beginning...; but after a short time the Greek verbs became too much for him. However I might set about it, whatever trick I might invent to enliven the lessons, it was no use. – "Mendes", he would say... "do you seriously believe that such horrors are indispensable to a man who wants to do what I want to do: give peace to poor creatures and reconcile them to their existence on earth?" [40]

Van Gogh stayed less than one year in Amsterdam, and then he abandoned his studies. He did not lack talent – van Gogh spoke a couple of languages, read German books, and wrote his letters in English and French. But he was impatient- he didn't want to meditate on the Gospel; he wanted to live it. He travelled to Brussels to begin training at a mission school. Three months later, he left the school and applied for a job as a preacher in the Borinage, a Belgian mining area. In January, 1879, he found a temporary post that might have been renewed if an inspector of the Comité d'Évangélisation had not discovered that the new preacher took the Bible more literally than the authorities of the church.



Reverend Bonte, a vicar who also worked in the neighbourhood, reported: “He felt obliged to imitate the early Christians, to sacrifice all he could live without, and he wanted to be even more destitute than the majority of the miners to whom he preached the Gospel. I must add that also his Dutch cleanliness was singularly abandoned; soap was banished as a wicked luxury; and when our evangelist was not wholly covered with a layer of coal dust, his face was usually dirtier than that of the miners.... He no longer felt any inducement to care for his own well-being – his heart had been aroused by the sight of others’ want. He preferred to go to the unfortunate, the wounded, the sick, and always stayed with them a long time; he was willing to make any sacrifice to relieve their sufferings.”[41]

After he ‘failed’ as a preacher, van Gogh broke with the church, which was, in his opinion, dominated by Christian conventions instead of a Christ-like love for mankind. This rupture also sent ripples through his relationship with his father, who threatened to have his son committed to the mental hospital in Gheel.[42] After his father’s death in 1885, van Gogh expressed his resentment against father and church in two still lifes: one shows his father’s pipe and tobacco pouch lying next to a vase with a bouquet of flowers, known in Holland as Silver of Judas. The second composition depicts a large, open Bible next to a small, well-thumbed copy of Zola’s *Joie de Vivre* – “The Joy of Life”. Vicar van Gogh disapproved of his son’s preference for contemporary French literature, which, in his opinion, was depraved. The Bible in the painting is opened to the book of Isaiah, chapter 53: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” The correspondence between autumn 1879 and spring 1880 is full of gaps. Van Gogh remained in the Borinage, where he spent most of his time drawing. He had already started to make sketches in Brussels and during his time as a preacher continued to do so:

“Often I draw far into the night, to keep some souvenir and to strengthen the thoughts raised involuntarily by the aspect of things here.”[43]

For his parents’ sake, van Gogh tried to cloak his artistic aspirations in the more sensible garb of a bourgeois professional, like a printer or a technical draughtsman. He told his mother that he wanted to draw costumes and machines. In his letters to Theo he was more candid:

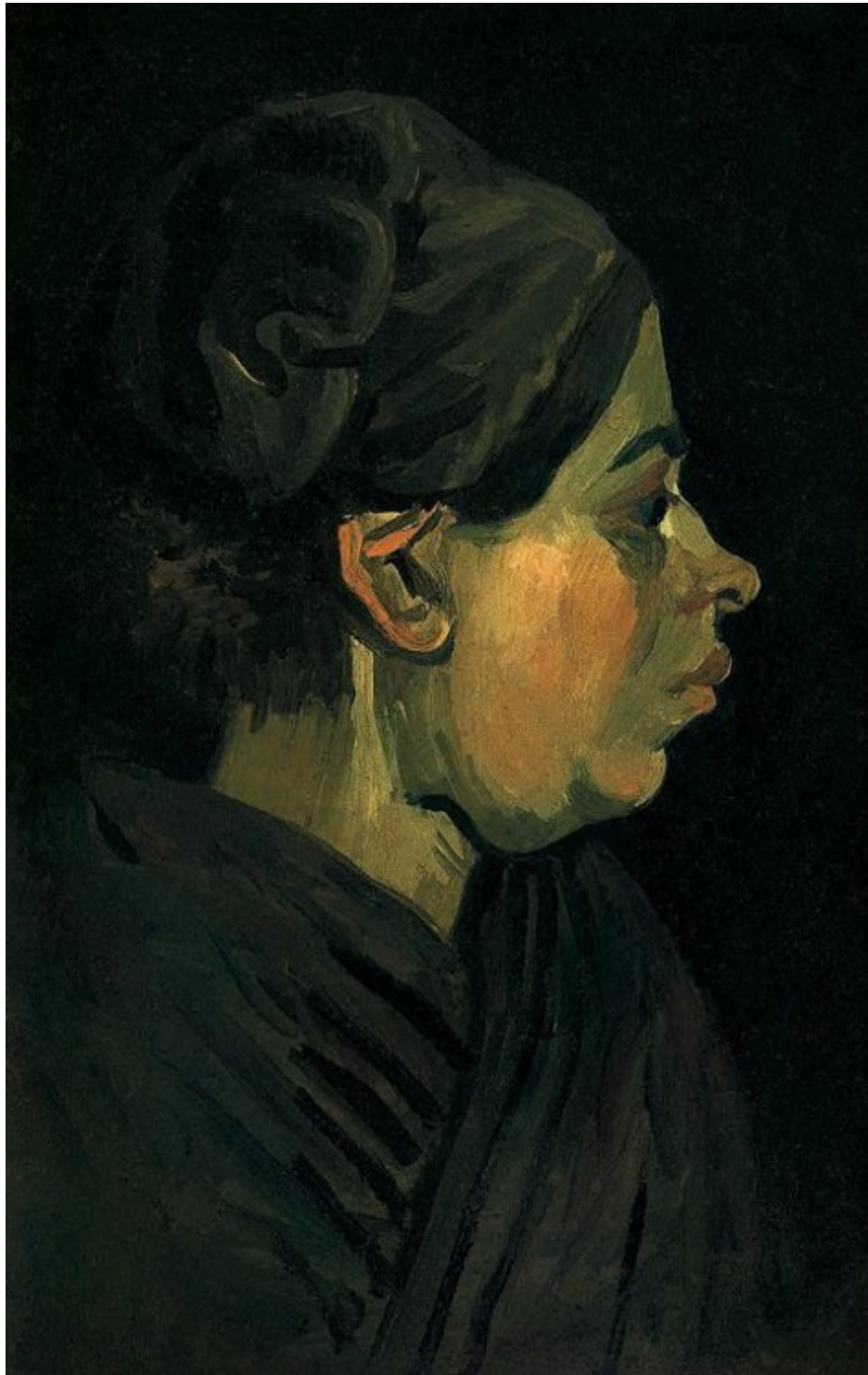
“On the other hand, you would also be mistaken if you thought that I would do well to follow your advice literally to become an engraver of bill headings and visiting cards,... But, you say, I do not expect you take that advice literally; I was just afraid you were too fond of spending your days in idleness, and I thought you had to put an end to it. May I observe that this is a rather strange sort of ‘idleness’. It is somewhat difficult for me to defend myself, but I should be very sorry if, sooner or later, you could not see it differently.”[44]

Van Gogh compared his unproductive period with a bird’s change of feathers:

“As the moulting time... is for birds, so adversity or misfortune is the difficult time for us human beings. One can stay in it – in that time of moulting – or one can emerge renewed; but anyhow it must not be done in public and it is not at all amusing, therefore the only thing to do is to hide oneself. Well, so be it.”[45]



61. *Peasant Woman with a White Bonnet*,  
Nuenen, February-March 1885. Oil on canvas,  
37 x 45 cm. Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal.



62. *Head of a Woman*,  
Nuenen, January 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 37.5 x 24.5 cm.  
The Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati.



The 'renewed' van Gogh made two important decisions: First, he resolved to determine the course of his life entirely on his own and not to seek his family's advice; second, he set out to put his passions to good use:

“When I was in other surroundings, in the surroundings of pictures and works of art, you know how violent a passion I had for them, reaching the highest pitch of enthusiasm. And I am not sorry about it, for even now, far from that place, I am often homesick for the land of pictures.”[\[46\]](#)

Homesick for the world of art, van Gogh moved to Brussels in October, 1880. He began to study with reproductions and models: “There are laws of proportions, of light and shadow, of perspective, which one must know in order to be able to draw well; without that knowledge, it always remains a fruitless struggle, and one never creates anything.”[\[47\]](#) Though his father disapproved of his decision, he supported his son financially. Theo, who by that time had begun working in Goupil's branch in Paris, also sent him money. In the spring of 1881, to reduce his expenses, van Gogh moved to the vicarage in Etten, where his father had been working for some time. The young painter did not suffer from material wants, but his family neither understood nor supported his ideas: “Father and Mother are very good to me in that they do everything to feed me well, etc. Of course I appreciate it very much, but it cannot be denied that food and drink and sleep are not enough for a man, that he longs for something nobler and higher – aye, he positively cannot do without it.”[\[48\]](#)

At this time, “something nobler and higher” meant not his artistic work but his love for his cousin Kee. Although she had resisted his advances, he continued trying to win her heart. His family was ashamed by his persistence and openly criticized his passion. After a particularly heated argument during the Christmas holidays in 1881, the pastor ordered his wayward son to leave. Two years later Vincent returned to the family nest for the last time. With this final break, he abandoned the family name, and began signing his canvases simply ‘Vincent.’ The event that precipitated the rupture was van Gogh's decision to take up residence in The Hague with the prostitute Christina Hoornik, called Sien. In May, 1882 he wrote to Theo:

“Last winter I met a pregnant woman, deserted by a man whose child she carried. A pregnant woman who had to walk the streets in winter, had to earn her bread, you understand how. I took this woman for a model, and I have worked with her all the winter. I could not pay her the full wages of a model, but that did not prevent my paying her rent, and thank God, so far I have been able to protect her and her child from hunger and cold by sharing my own bread with her.”[\[49\]](#)





63. *Peasant Woman in a White Bonnet*,  
Nuenen, December 1884-January 1885.  
Lead pencil and charcoal, 33.6 x 20.9 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

The compassion he felt for the pregnant woman was coupled with his longing to have a nest:

“I have a feeling of being at home when I am with her, as though she gives me my own hearth, a feeling that our lives are interwoven.”[\[50\]](#)

The family reacted with reproaches, exhortations, and threats. Once again, the familiar pattern recurs: van Gogh’s parents could not understand the behavior of their son, but they cared about his wellbeing. In the winter of 1883 they sent him a package of clothes which included a woman’s coat. For some time van Gogh had been dependent on people who did not accept him, a paradox that prompted him to think at length about the relationship between art and money. He wrote to Theo:

“I will succeed in earning money to keep myself, not in luxury, but as one who eats his bread in the sweat of his brow.”[\[51\]](#)

In the years to come, van Gogh would defend the artist as a productive, and therefore respectable, member of society. He began sending Theo some of his pictures in exchange for the money he sent; in this way, Theo became his employer rather than his patron. In The Hague, van Gogh focused on figurative drawing. Sien was his most important model:

“I find in her exactly what I want: her life has been rough, and sorrow and adversity have put their marks upon her – now I can do something with her.”[\[52\]](#)

Van Gogh’s conception of women was quite far removed from the classical ideal of beauty. On one occasion, he expressed his opinion in these terms:

“Uncle Cor asked me today if I didn’t like Phryne by Gérôme. I told him that I would rather see a homely woman by Israëls or Millet, or an old woman by Edouard Frère: for what’s the use of a beautiful body such as Phryne’s? Animals have it too, perhaps even more than men; but the soul, as it lives in the people painted by Israëls or Millet or Frère, that is what animals never have. Is not life given to us to become richer in spirit, even though the outward appearance may suffer?”[\[53\]](#)

For some time van Gogh served as an apprentice to the painter Anton Mauve. It was during this time he started to paint with oil colours. His major motifs involved people:

“I am decidedly not a landscape painter; when I make landscapes, there will always be something of the figure in them.”[\[54\]](#)

The comparison between the drawings *Sorrow*, a crouched nude, and *Les Racines (Roots of a Tree)* tells us something of what he has in mind:

“I tried to put the same sentiment into the landscape as into the figure: the convulsive, passionate clinging to the earth, and yet being half torn up by a storm. I wanted to express something of the struggle for life in that pale, slender woman’s figure, as well as in the black, gnarled and knotty roots.”[\[55\]](#)





64. *Man with Top Hat*,  
The Hague, December 1882.  
Lead pencil, 45 x 24.5 cm.  
Collection of the Hannema-de

Stuers Foundation, Heino/Wijhe.





65. *Self-Portrait with Felt Hat*,  
Paris, spring 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 41.5 x 32.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

When Mauve discovered that van Gogh was living with Sien, he canceled the contract. Tersteeg, van Gogh's former master, sought to pressure him by asking Theo to stop his financial support. The painter was largely isolated in The Hague, and his relations with Sien became increasingly strained as money grew tight. During a visit, Theo convinced Vincent to abandon the relationship. At the end of 1883, van Gogh joined his parents, who had moved to Etten, near Eindhoven. The return of the prodigal son was not a success:

“I am sick at heart about the fact that, coming back after two years' absence, the welcome home was kind and cordial in every respect, but basically there has been no change whatever, not the slightest, in what I must call the most extreme blindness and ignorance as to the insight into our mutual position.”[56]

Because his family was unable to understand him – to know him – van Gogh severed the connection. “They have the same dread of taking me in the house as they would about taking a big rough dog. He would run into the room with wet paws – and he is so rough. He will be in everybody's way. And he barks so loud. In short, he is a foul beast.... And I, admitting that I am a kind of dog, leave them alone.”[57] Van Gogh was often criticised because of his appearance and his manners. He confessed that, in some periods of his life, he had neglected his clothes in order to ensure his solitude.

He left the vicarage and rented rooms in the home of a Catholic sexton. When he visited his father's house for a meal, he sat away from the family table: “I consciously choose the dog's path through life; I will remain the dog, I shall be poor, I shall be a painter, I want to remain human – going into nature.”[58] In the summer of 1884, van Gogh met Margot Begemann, a neighbour's daughter.

The 43-year-old-woman fell in love with the 31-year-old, who, as he stressed to Theo, had feelings of friendship for her and respected her “on a certain point that would have dishonoured her socially.”[59] He noticed “certain symptoms” in her behavior, and so wrote to his brother “that I was afraid that she would get brain fever, and that I was sorry to state that, in my eyes, the Begemann family acted extremely imprudently in speaking to her the way they did. This had no effect, at least no other than that they told me to wait two years, which I decidedly refused to do, saying that if there was a question of marriage, it had to be soon or not at all.”[60] At the beginning of September, Margot attempted suicide. Van Gogh rescued her by making her vomit the poison she had taken. He reported this incident “which hardly anybody here knows, or suspects, or may ever know”[61] to Theo. Defamation and the family's pressure were, in van Gogh's view, the reasons behind the suicide attempt:

“But for heaven's sake, what is the meaning of that standing and of that religion which the respectable people maintain? Oh, they are perfectly absurd, making society a kind of lunatic asylum, a perfectly topsy-turvy world – oh, that mysticism.”[62]

Four years later, van Gogh was to suffer his own crisis, a despair which would drive him to suicide. Unlike Margot he would not be rescued.

Van Gogh's artistic work in Nuenen is dominated by one central motif: the working man. The painter went into the fields and drew women digging out potatoes. He also sketched the weavers. In April

1885, he worked on the oil painting *The Potato Eaters*, today considered his first masterpiece. He described the picture to Theo: "I have tried to emphasise that those people, eating their potatoes in the lamplight, have dug the earth with those very hands they put in the dish, and so it speaks of manual labor, and how honestly they earned their food. I wanted to give the impression of a way of life quite different from that of us civilised people. Therefore I am not at all anxious for everyone to like it or to admire it at once." [63] In his letters, van Gogh stressed again and again his appreciation for the life of peasants and workers. However, as in the Borinage, he longed for the land of pictures. In November, 1885, he moved to Antwerp to join the Academy of Art. However, he stayed there for only a short time. Four months later, he left for Paris; he never returned to Holland. He declared later that he hadn't become an adventurer by choice "but by fate, and feeling nowhere so much myself a stranger as in my family and country." [64]

## **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh Cuesmes, mid August 1879**

Dear Theo,

I am writing to you especially to tell you how grateful I am for your visit. It had been quite a long time since we had seen each other or had written as we used to do. Still, it is better to be close than dead to each other, the more so as, until one is truly entitled to be called dead by virtue of one's legal demise, it smacks of hypocrisy or at least childishness to carry on as if it were true. Childish in the manner of a young man of 14 who believes his dignity and rank in society oblige him to wear a top hat.

The hours we spent together have at least assured us that we are both still in the land of the living. When I saw you again and walked with you, I had a feeling I used to have more often than I do now, namely that life is something good and precious which one should value, and I felt more cheerful and alive than I have been feeling for a long time, because in spite of myself my life has gradually become less precious, much less important and more a matter of indifference to me, or so it seemed.

When one lives with others and is bound by feelings of affection, then one realises that one has a reason for living, that one may not be utterly worthless and expendable, but is perhaps good for something, since we need one another and are journeying together as *compagnons de voyage*. But our proper sense of self-esteem is also highly dependent upon our relationship with others.

A prisoner who is condemned to solitude, who is prevented from working, etc., will in the long run, especially if the run is too long, suffer from the effects as surely as one who has gone hungry too long.

Like everyone else, I need friendly or affectionate relationships or intimate companionship, and am not made of stone or iron like a pump or a lamppost, and like any man of culture or decency I cannot do without these things and not feel a void, a lack of something - and I tell you all this to let you know how much good your visit has done me.





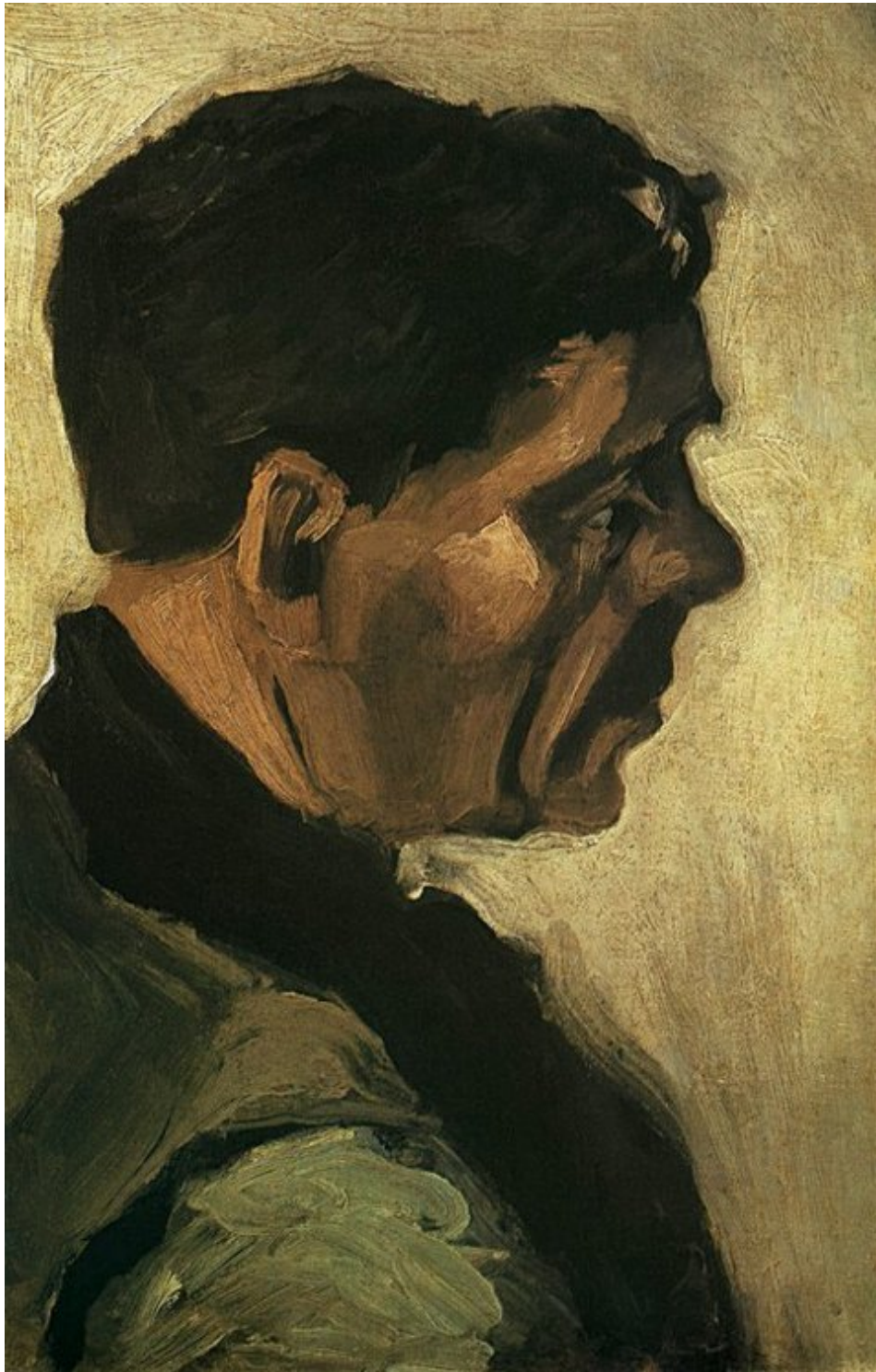
66. *The Wounded Veteran*,  
The Hague, c. 1882-1883. Graphite,  
brown ink, black ink and wash,  
white gouache on heavily textured white wove paper,

40 x 52 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



67. *Head of a Young Man*,  
Nuenen, December 1884-January 1885.  
Lead pencil, 34.7 x 21.6 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





68. *Head of a Man*,  
Nuenen, March-April 1885. Oil on canvas,  
44 x 32 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





69. *The Little Path in Montmartre*,  
Paris, spring 1886.  
Oil on cardboard on multiplex, 22 x 16 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

And just as I would not want us to become estranged, so I would want to keep in with all at home. For the moment, however, I am not very keen on going back there and would much rather stay on here. Yet it may well all have been my own fault and you could be right about my not seeing things straight. And so, despite my great reluctance and though it is a hard course for me to take, I may yet go to Etten, at least for a few days.

As I think back with gratitude to your visit, my thoughts return to our discussions as well, of course. I have had similar ones before, even a good many and often. Plans for improvement and change and generating energy - and yet, do not be offended, I am a little frightened by them, not least because I have sometimes acted upon them only to have my hopes dashed.

How fresh my memory of that time in Amsterdam is. You were there yourself, so you know how things were planned and discussed, argued and considered, talked over with wisdom, with the best intentions, and yet how miserable the result was, how ridiculous the whole undertaking, how utterly foolish. I still shudder when I think of it.

It was the worst time I have ever lived through. How desirable and attractive have become the difficult days, those that are full of care here in this poor country, in these uncivilised surroundings, compared to that. I fear a similar result if I follow wise advice given with the best intentions.

Such experiences are too dreadful - the harm, the sorrow, the affliction is too great - not to try on both sides to become wiser by this dearly bought experience. If we do not learn from this, what shall we learn from? To try "to reach the goal which was set before me," as the expression was then; indeed, I no longer aspire to it, the ambition has greatly abated. Even if it looked and sounded well before, now I look at those things from another point of view gained by experience, although this opinion is not permissible.

Not permissible, aye, just as Frank the Evangelist thought it reprehensible of me to assert that the sermons of the Reverend Mr. John Andry are only a little more evangelical than those of a Roman Catholic priest. I would rather die a natural death than be prepared for it by the Academy, and I have sometimes had a lesson from a German mower that was of more use to me than one in Greek.

A change for the better in my life, shouldn't I long for that, or are there times when one has no need of betterment?

I hope I do become much improved. But precisely because that is what I long for, I am afraid of remèdes pires que le mal [cures worse than the disease]. Can you blame a patient for standing up to his doctor and preferring not to be given the wrong treatment or quack remedies?

Is it wrong for someone suffering from consumption or typhus to insist that a more potent remedy than barley water might be indicated, might indeed be essential, or, while finding nothing wrong with barley water as such, to question its effectiveness and potency in his particular case? The doctor who prescribed the barley water would be wrong to say: this patient is an obstinate mule who is courting his own destruction because he refuses to take his medicine - no, it is not that the man is unwilling, but that the so-called remedy is worthless, because though it might well be good for something, it does not fit the case.

Can you blame a person for remaining indifferent to a painting listed in the catalogue as a Memling, but having nothing more in common with a Memling than that it has a similar subject from the Gothic period, but without artistic merit?

And if you should conclude from these remarks that I meant to suggest your advice was worthy of a quack, then you have completely misunderstood me, as I have no such thoughts or opinions about you. If, on the other hand, you believe that I would do well to follow your advice literally to become an engraver of invoice headings and visiting cards, or a bookkeeper or a carpenter's apprentice - or follow the advice of my very dear sister Anna to devote myself to the baker's trade or many other similar things (curiously at odds and hardly compatible) that other people advise me.

But you say, "I do not expect you to take that advice literally; I was just afraid you were too fond of spending your days in idleness, and I thought you should put an end to it."

May I observe that this is a rather strange sort of "idleness." It is somewhat difficult for me to defend myself, but I should be very sorry if, sooner or later, you could not see it differently. I am not sure it would be right to combat such an accusation by becoming a baker, for instance. It would indeed be a decisive answer (always supposing that it were possible to assume, quick as lightning, the form of a baker, a barber or a librarian); but at the same time it would be a foolish answer, more or less like the action of a man who, when reproached with cruelty for riding a donkey, immediately dismounted and continued his way with the donkey on his shoulders.



70. *Pollard Birches*,  
Nuenen, March 1884. Pencil,  
pen in brown (once black) ink,  
heightened with white opaque watercolour,  
on wove paper, 39 x 54 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





71. *The Cottage*,  
Nuenen, May 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 64 x 78 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



72. *Smoked Herrings*,  
Paris, summer 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 21 x 42 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

And now, all joking aside, it is my honest opinion that it would be better if the relationship between us were to become closer on both sides. If ever I came to believe seriously that I was being a nuisance or a burden to you or those at home, of no use to anyone, and were obliged to look upon myself as an intruder or to feel superfluous so far as you are concerned, so that it would be better if I were not there at all, and if I should have to try all the time to keep out of other people's way - were I really to think that, then I should be overwhelmed by a feeling of sadness and should have to wrestle with despair.

I find it hard to bear this thought and even harder to bear the thought that so much dissention, misery and sorrow that exists between us, and in our home, may have been caused by me. Should that indeed be the case, then I might wish it were granted me not to have much longer to live.

Yet when this thought sometimes depresses me beyond measure, far too deeply, after a long time another occurs too: 'Perhaps it is only an awful, frightening dream and later we may learn to see and understand more clearly.' Or is it real, and will it ever get better rather than worse? Many people would undoubtedly consider it foolish and superstitious to go on believing in a change for the better.

It is sometimes so bitterly cold in the winter that one says, 'the cold is too awful for me to care whether summer is coming or not; the harm outdoes the good.' But with or without our approval, the severe weather does come to an end eventually and one fine morning the wind changes and there is the thaw. When I compare the state of the weather to our state of mind and our circumstances, subject to change and fluctuation like the weather, then I still have some hope that things may get better.

If you were to write again soon, you would make me very happy. Should you do so, please address your letter care of J. B. Denis, Rue du Petit Wasmes à Wasmes (Hainaut).

Walked to Wasmes the evening after you left. Have drawn yet another portrait since. Goodbye, accept a handshake in my thoughts and believe me,

Yours truly, Vincent

## **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh Cuesmes, July 1880**

My Dear Theo,

I am writing to you rather reluctantly because, for a good many reasons, I have kept silent for such a long time. To some extent you have become a stranger to me, and I to you, perhaps more than you think. It is probably better for us not to go on like that. It is probable that I would not have written to you even now, were it not that I feel obliged, compelled, to do so - because, be it noted, you yourself have compelled me to.

I heard in Etten that you had sent 50 francs for me. Well, I have accepted them. With reluctance, of course, with a feeling of some despondency, of course, but I have reached a sort of impasse, am in trouble, what else can I do? And so I am writing to thank you.

As you may know, I am back in the Borinage. Father said he would prefer me to stay somewhere near Etten, but I refused and I believe I was right to do so. To the family, I have, willy-nilly, become a more or less objectionable and shady sort of character, at any rate a bad lot. How then could I then be of any use to anyone? And so I am inclined to think the best and most sensible solution all round would be for me to go away and to keep my distance, to cease to be, as it were. What the moulting season is for birds - the time when they lose their feathers - setbacks, misfortune and hard times are for us human beings. You can cling to the moulting season or you can emerge from it reborn, but it must not be done in public.

The thing is far from amusing, not very exhilarating, and so one should take care to keep out of the way. Well, so be it.

Now, though it is a fairly hopeless task to regain the trust of an entire family, one which has perhaps never been wholly weaned from prejudice and other equally honourable and respectable qualities, I am not entirely without hope that, bit by bit, slowly but surely, the good relationship between one and all may be restored. In the first place I should be glad to see this good relationship - to put it no more strongly than that - restored at least between Father and me, and further, I set great store by seeing it restored between the two of us. A good relationship is infinitely preferable to a misunderstanding.





73. *Still Life with two Sacks and Bottle*,  
Nuenen, November 1884.  
Oil on canvas on wood, 31.7 x 42 cm.  
Private Collection.



74. *Still Life with Earthenware and Clogs*,  
Nuenen, November 1884. Oil on canvas on wood,  
42 x 56 cm. Centraal Museum, Utrecht.

Now I must trouble you with certain abstract matters, hoping that you will listen to them patiently. I am a man of passions, capable of and given to doing more or less outrageous things for which I sometimes feel a little sorry. Every so often I say or do something too hastily, when it would have been better to show a little more patience. Other people also act rashly at times, I think.

This being the case, what can be done about it? Should I consider myself a dangerous person, unfit for anything? I think not. Rather, every means should be tried to put these very passions to good effect.

To mention just one by way of an example, I have a more or less irresistible passion for books and the constant need to improve my mind, to study if you like, just as I have a need to eat bread. You will understand that. When I lived in other surroundings, surroundings full of pictures and works of art, I conceived a violent, almost fanatical passion for those surroundings, as you know. And I do not regret that, and even now, far from home, I often feel homesick for the land of pictures.

You may remember that I knew very well (and it may be that I know it still) what Rembrandt was or what Millet was or Jules Dupré or Delacroix or Millais or Matthijs Maris.

Well, today I am no longer in those surroundings, yet they say that what is known as the soul never dies but lives on forever, continuing to seek for ever and again.

So instead of succumbing to my homesickness I told myself: your land, your fatherland, is all around. So instead of giving in to despair I chose active melancholy, in so far as I was capable of activity, in other words I chose the kind of melancholy that hopes, that strives and that seeks, in preference to the melancholy that despairs in numbness and distress. I accordingly made a more or less serious study of the books within my reach, such as the Bible and Michelet's *La Révolution Française*, and then last winter Shakespeare and a little Victor Hugo and Dickens and Beecher Stowe and recently Æschylus and then various less classical writers, a few great minor masters. You know, don't you, that Fabritius and Bida are counted among the minor masters?

Now anyone who becomes absorbed in all this is sometimes considered outrageous, 'shocking,' sinning more or less unwillingly against certain forms and customs and proprieties. It is a pity that people take that amiss.

You know, for example, that I have often neglected my appearance. I admit it, and I also admit that it is 'shocking.' But look here, lack of money and poverty have something to do with it too, as well as a profound disillusionment, and besides, it is sometimes a good way of ensuring the solitude you need, of concentrating more or less on whatever study you are immersed in.

One essential study is that of medicine. There is scarcely anybody who does not try to acquire some knowledge of it, who does not at least try to grasp what it is about (and you see, I still know absolutely nothing about it). And all these things absorb you, preoccupy you, set you dreaming, musing and thinking.

Now for the past five years or so, I don't know how long exactly, I have been more or less without permanent employment, wandering from pillar to post.

You will say, ever since such and such a time you have been going downhill, you have been feeble, you have done nothing. Is that entirely true?

What is true is that I have at times earned my own crust of bread, and at other times a friend has given it to me out of the goodness of his heart. I have lived whatever way I could, for better or for worse, taking things just as they came. It is true that I have forfeited the trust of various people, it is true that my financial affairs are in a sorry state, it is true that the future looks rather bleak, it is true that I might have done better, it is true that I have wasted time when it comes to earning a living, it is true that my studies are in a fairly lamentable and appalling state, and that my needs are greater, infinitely greater, than my resources. But does that mean going downhill and doing nothing?

You might say, but why didn't you go through with university, continue as they wanted you to? To that I can only reply that it was too expensive, and besides, the future then looked no better than it does now, along the path I am now taking.

And I must continue to follow the path I take now. If I do nothing, if I study nothing, if I cease searching, then, woe is me, I am lost. That is how I look at it - keep going, keep going come what may.





75. *Still Life with a Basket, Fruit, Meat and a Roll*,  
Paris, summer 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



76. *Still Life with Brushes in a Plant Pot*,  
Nuenen, November 1884.  
Oil on canvas on wood, 31.5 x 41.5 cm.  
Private Collection.

But what is your final goal, you may ask. That goal will become clearer, will emerge slowly but surely, much as the rough draught turns into a sketch, and the sketch into a painting through the serious work done on it, through the elaboration of the original vague idea and through the consolidation of the first fleeting and passing thought.

You should know that it is the same with evangelists as it is with artists. There is an old academic school, often odious and tyrannical, the 'abomination of desolation', in short, men who dress, as it were, in a suit of steel armour, a cuirass, of prejudice and convention. When they are in charge, it is they who hand out the jobs and try, with much red tape, to keep them for their protégés and to exclude the man with an open mind.

Their God is like the God of Shakespeare's drunken Falstaff, "the inside of a church." Indeed, by a strange coincidence, some evangelical gentlemen have the same view of matters spiritual as that drunkard (which might surprise them somewhat were they capable of human emotion). But there is little fear that their blindness will ever turn into insight.

This is a bad state of affairs for anyone who differs from them and protests with heart and soul and all the indignation he can muster. For my part, I hold those academics who are not like these academics in high esteem, but the decent ones are thinner on the ground than you might think.

Now, one of the reasons why I have no regular job, and why I have not had a regular job for years, is quite simply that my ideas differ from those of the gentlemen who hand out the jobs to individuals who think as they do. It is not just a question of my appearance, which is what they have sanctimoniously reproached me with. It goes deeper, I assure you.

I am telling you all this not to complain, not to make excuses for matters in which I may perhaps have been somewhat at fault, but simply to tell you the following: during your final visit last summer when we were walking together near that abandoned mineshaft which they call "La Sorcière," you reminded me of another walk we once took at another time near the old canal and the mill at Rijswijk, and, you said, we used to agree about many things, but, you added, "You have changed since then, you are no longer the same." Well, that is not entirely true. What has changed is that my life then was less difficult and my future seemingly less gloomy, but as far as my inner self, my way of looking at things and of thinking is concerned, that has not changed. But if there has indeed been a change, then it is that I think,

believe and love more seriously now what I thought, believed and loved even then.

So you would be mistaken should you continue to think that I have become less keen on, say, Rembrandt, Millet, or Delacroix or whoever or whatever, for the reverse is the case, but there are many different things worth believing and loving, you see - there is something of Rembrandt in Shakespeare, something of Correggio or of Sarto in Michelet and something of Delacroix in Victor Hugo, and there is also something of Rembrandt in the Gospel or, if you prefer, something of the Gospel in Rembrandt, it comes to much the same thing, provided you understand it properly, do not try to distort it and bear in mind that the elements of the comparisons are not intended to detract in any way from the merits of the original individuals.

And in Bunyan there is something of M. Maris or of Millet, a reality that, in a manner of speaking, is more real than reality itself, something hitherto unknown that, if only you can read it, will tell you untold things.

And in Beecher Stowe there is something of Ary Scheffer. Now, if you can forgive someone for immersing himself in pictures, perhaps you will also grant that the love of books is as sacred as that of Rembrandt, indeed, I believe that the two complement each other.

I very much admire the portrait of a man by Fabritius that we stood looking at for a long time in the gallery in Haarlem one day when we took another walk together. Admittedly, I am as fond of Dickens's 'Richard Cartone' [Sydney Carton] in his Paris and London in 1793 [A Tale of Two Cities], and I could point to other particularly gripping characters in other books with a more or less striking resemblance. And I think that Kent, a character in Shakespeare's "King Lear," is as noble and distinguished a man as that figure by Thomas de Keyser, though Kent and King Lear are reputed to have lived much earlier.

Let me stop there, but my God, how beautiful Shakespeare is, who else is as mysterious as he is; his language and method are like a brush trembling with excitement and ecstasy. But one must learn to read, just as one must learn to see and learn to live.

So please don't think that I am renouncing anything, I am reasonably faithful in my unfaithfulness and though I have changed, I am the same, and what preys on my mind is simply this one question: what am I good for, could I not be of service or use in some way, how can I become more knowledgeable and study some subject or other in depth?



That is what keeps preying on my mind, you see, and then one feels imprisoned by poverty, barred from taking part in this or that project and all sorts of necessities are out of one's reach. As a result one cannot rid oneself of melancholy, one feels emptiness where there might have been friendship and sublime and genuine affection, and one feels dreadful disappointment gnawing at one's spiritual energy, fate seems to stand in the way of affection or one feels a wave of disgust welling up inside. And then one says "How long, my God?"



77. *White Carnations and Little Roses  
in a Vase with a Bottle,*  
Paris, summer 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 40 x 32 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



78. *Sunflowers, Roses and other Flowers in a Bowl*,  
Paris, August-September 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 50 x 61 cm.  
Kunsthalle, Mannheim.





79. *A Vase with Carnations and Flowers*,  
Paris, summer 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 38 cm. Collection of  
David Lloyd Kreeger, Washington, D.C.



Well, that's how it is, can you tell what goes on within by looking at what happens without? There may be a great fire in our soul, but no one ever comes to warm himself by it, all that passers-by can see is a little smoke coming out of the chimney, and they walk on.

All right, then, what is to be done, should one tend that inward fire, turn to oneself for strength, wait patiently - yet with how much impatience! - wait, I say, for the moment when someone who wants to comes and sits down beside one's fire and perhaps stays on? Let him who believes in God await the moment that will sooner or later arrive.

Well, right now it seems that things are going very badly for me, they have been doing so for some considerable time, and may continue to do so well into the future. But it is possible that everything will get better after it has all seemed to go wrong.

I am not counting on it, it may never happen, but if there should be a change for the better I should regard that as a gain, I should rejoice, I should say, at last! So there was something after all! But, you will say, what a dreadful person you are, with your impossible religious notions and idiotic scruples. If my ideas are impossible or idiotic then I would like nothing better than to be rid of them. But this is roughly the way I see things. In *Le Philosophe sous les Toits* by Souvestre you can read what a man of the people, a simple craftsman, pitiful if you will, thinks of his country: "Tu n'as peut-être jamais pensé à ce que c'est la patrie, reprit-il, en me posant une main sur l'épaule; c'est tout ce qui t'entoure, tout ce qui t'a élevé et nourri, tout ce que tu as aimé. Cette campagne que tu vois, ces maisons, ces arbres, ces jeunes filles qui passent là en riant, c'est la patrie! Les lois qui te protègent, le pain qui paye ton travail, les paroles que tu échanges, la joie et la tristesse qui te viennent des hommes et des choses parmi lesquels tu vis, c'est la patrie! La petite chambre où tu as autrefois vu ta mère, les souvenirs qu'elle t'a laissés, la terre où elle repose, c'est la patrie! Tu la vois, tu la respirez partout! Figure toi, tes affections et tes besoins, tes souvenirs et ta reconnaissance, réunis tout ça sous un seul nom et ce nom sera la patrie." [You may never have thought what your country really is, he continued, placing his hand on my shoulder; it is everything around you, everything that has raised and nourished you, everything that you have loved. This countryside that you see; these houses, these trees, these young girls laughing as they pass, that is your country! The laws that protect you, the

bread that rewards your labour, the words you speak, the joy and sorrow that come from the people and things in whose midst you live, that is your country! The little room where you used in days gone by to see your mother, the memories she left you, the earth in which she rests, that is your country! You see it, you breathe it, everywhere! Imagine your rights and your duties, your affections and your needs, your memories and your gratitude, gather all that together under a single name, and that name will be your country.]

In the same way I think that everything that is really good and beautiful, the inner, moral, spiritual and sublime beauty in men and their works, comes from God, and everything that is bad and evil in the works of men and in men is not from God, and God does not approve of it.

But I cannot help thinking that the best way of knowing God is to love many things. Love this friend, this person, this thing, whatever you like, and you will be on the right road to understanding Him better, that is what I keep telling myself. But you must love with a sublime, genuine, profound sympathy, with devotion, with intelligence, and you must try all the time to understand Him more, better and yet more. That will lead to God, that will lead to an unshakeable faith.

To take an example: one man will love Rembrandt, genuinely, and that man will surely know that there is a God, he will really believe it. Another will make a thorough study of the French Revolution - he will not be an unbeliever, he will see that there is a supreme authority that manifests itself in great affairs. Yet another has recently attended a free course of lectures at the great university of sorrow and has heeded the things he saw with his eyes and heard with his ears, and has reflected upon them. He too will come to believe in the end and will perhaps have learnt more than he can tell.

Try to grasp the essence of what the great artists, the serious masters, say in their masterpieces, and you will again find God in them. One man has written or said it in a book, another in a painting. Just read the Bible and the Gospel, that will start you thinking, thinking about many things, thinking about everything, well then, think about many things, think about everything, that will lift your thoughts above the humdrum despite yourself. We know how to read, so let us read!

Now then, you may well have bouts of being a little absent-minded, a little dreamy; indeed there are some who become too absent-minded, a little too dreamy. That may indeed have happened with me, but all in all that is my own fault, maybe there as a reason for it, perhaps I was lost in thought

for one reason or another, anxious, worried, but one gets over that in the end. The dreamer sometimes falls into the doldrums, but is said to emerge from them again. And the absent-minded person also makes up for it with bouts of perspicacity. Sometimes he is a person whose right to exist has a justification that is not always immediately obvious to you, or more usually, you may absent-mindedly allow it to slip from your mind. Someone who has been wandering about for a long time, tossed to and fro on a stormy sea, will in the end reach his destination.

Someone who has seemed to be good for nothing, unable to fill any job, any appointment, will find one in the end and, energetic and capable, will prove himself quite different from what he seemed at first.



80. *Vase with Red Poppies*,  
Paris, summer 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 56 x 46.5 cm.  
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford.





81. *Roses and Peonies*,  
Paris, June 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 59 x 71 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



82. *Bowl with Summer Flowers*,  
Paris, summer 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 50.2 x 61 cm.  
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.





83. *Fritillaries in a Copper Vase*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas,  
73.5 x 60.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

I am writing somewhat at random, writing whatever flows from my pen. I should be very happy if you could see in me something more than a kind of fainéant [idler]. For there is a great difference between one idler and another idler. There is someone who is an idler out of laziness and lack of character, owing to the baseness of his nature. If you like, you may take me for one of those. Then there is the other kind of idler, the idler despite himself, who is inwardly consumed by a great longing for action who does nothing because his hands are tied, because he is, so to speak, imprisoned somewhere, because he lacks what he needs to be productive, because disastrous circumstances have brought him forcibly to this end. Such a one does not always know what he can do, but he nevertheless instinctively feels, "I am good for something! My existence is not without reason! I know that I could be a quite a different person! How can I be of use, how can I be of service?" There is something inside me, but what can it be? He is quite another idler. If you like you may take me for one of those.

A caged bird in spring knows perfectly well that there is some way in which he should be able to serve. He is well aware that there is something to be done, but he is unable to do it. What is it? He cannot quite remember, but then he gets a vague inkling and he says to himself, "The others are building their nests and hatching their young and bringing them up," and then he bangs his head against the bars of the cage. But the cage does not give way and the bird is maddened by pain. "What a idler," says another bird passing by - what an idler. Yet the prisoner lives and does not die. There are no outward signs of what is going on inside him; he is doing well, he is quite cheerful in the sunshine.

But then the season of the great migration arrives, an attack of melancholy. He has everything he needs, say the children who tend him in his cage - but he looks out, at the heavy thundery sky, and in his heart of hearts he rebels against his fate. I am caged, I am caged and you say I need nothing, you idiots! I have everything I need, indeed! Oh! please give me the freedom to be a bird like other birds!

A kind of idler of a person resembles that kind of idler, like that kind of bird. And people are often unable to do anything, imprisoned as they are in I don't know what kind of terrible, terrible, oh so terrible cages.





84. *Vase with Red and White Carnations  
against a Yellow Background,*  
Paris, summer 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 40 x 52 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

I do know that there is a release, the belated release. A justly or unjustly ruined reputation, poverty, disastrous circumstances, misfortune, they all turn you into a prisoner. You cannot always tell what keeps you confined, what immures you, what seems to bury you, and yet you can feel those elusive bars, railings, walls. Is all this illusion, imagination? I don't think so. And then one asks: My God! Will it be for long, will it be for ever, will it be for eternity?

Do you know what makes the prison disappear? Every deep, genuine affection. Being friends, being brothers, loving, that is what opens the prison, with supreme power, by some magic force. Without these one stays dead.

But whenever affection is revived, there life revives. Moreover, the prison is sometimes called prejudice, misunderstanding, fatal ignorance of one thing or another, suspicion, false modesty.

But to change the subject - if I have come down in the world, you have in a different way come up in it. And if I have forfeited sympathy, you have gained it. I am glad of that, I say that in all sincerity, and it will always give me pleasure. If you lacked seriousness or consideration, I would be fearful that it might not last, but since I think that you are very serious and very considerate, I tend to believe it will!

But if you could see me as something other than an idler of the bad sort, I should be very happy.

For the rest, if I can ever do anything for you, be of some use to you, know that I am at your disposal. Now that I have accepted what you have given me, you are, should I be able to render you some service, in a position to ask me. It would make me happy, and I should take it a sign of trust. We have moved rather far apart and may in certain respects have perhaps different views, but some time, some day, one of us may be of service to the other.

For now I shake your hand, thanking you once again for having been so good to me. If, one of these days, you feel like writing, my address is, chez Ch. Decrucq, Rue du Pavillon 8, Cuesmes, near Mons, and know that it will do me good to hear from you.

Yours, Vincent



85. *Viaduct in Paris*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on canvas,  
31.5 x 40.5 cm. Justin K. Thannhauser Collection,  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.





86. *The Celebration of July 14th in Paris*,  
Paris, summer 1830.  
Oil on canvas, 44 x 39 cm.  
Collection of L. Jaggi-Hahnloser, Winterthur.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Brussels, January 1881**

My dear,

As I have not heard from you for so long - meaning, not for several months - nor even had the slightest answer to my last letter, perhaps it will not be out of place to ask you for some sign of life.

I must say it seems rather strange and rather unaccountable that you have not written me since the one letter I received on my arrival here. Not to write is good, but to write seasonably is not bad either; in some cases it is even much better.

In thinking of you, I unconsciously said to myself, why doesn't he write? If he is afraid of compromising himself in the eyes of Messrs. Goupil & Co. by keeping in touch with me - is his position with those gentlemen so shaky and unstable that he is obliged to be so careful? Or is it that he is afraid I will ask him for money? But if this was the reason for your silence, you might at least have waited until I tried to squeeze something out of you, as the saying goes.

However, I will not prolong this letter unnecessarily by enumerating a lot of things which occasionally pass through my head when I think of the reasons you may have had for not writing.

I have been drawing all winter until now, and I have also read a great deal, for indirectly that is very necessary to me. On the whole I can say I have made progress, but I ought to be able to get along more quickly. The principal motive for writing you now is to ask you if you know of any reason why I should not go to see Mr. Tersteeg and Mauve. I think it would be to my advantage to go to The Hague for a time. But if I knew for certain that Mr. Tersteeg would rather I did not go there, it might make me change my mind. What do you think about it?

I have seen little of Van Rappard, because it seemed to me that he did not like to be disturbed. As long as I am not more advanced, I must avoid young artists, who do not always reflect on what they do or say. And yet I long very much to find one who, being more advanced than I, could help me progress.

Well, tell me if you see any insurmountable obstacle to my going to The Hague for a while, and if perhaps you know any other course, in case I am prevented from going there.

I shake hands, awaiting a somewhat quicker reply,  
Vincent



87. *La Guinguette in Montmartre*,  
Paris, October 1886. Oil on canvas,  
49.5 x 64.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



88. *The Bois de Boulogne with Walkers*,  
Paris, summer 1886. Oil on canvas,  
37.5 x 45.5 cm. Private Collection, United States.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh  
Etten, 3 November 1881**

Dear Theo,

There is something on my mind that I want to tell you about. You may perhaps know something of it already and it will not be news to you. I wanted to let you know that I fell so much in love with Kee Vos this summer that I can find no other words for it than, "It is just as if Kee Vos were the closest person to me and I the closest person to Kee Vos," - those words I spoke to her. But when I told her this, she replied that her past and her future remained as one to her so that she could never return my feelings.

Then I was in a tremendous dilemma about what to do. Should I resign myself to that "never, no, never," or consider the matter not yet settled and done with, keep in good heart and not give up?

I chose the latter. And to this day I do not regret this approach, although I am still up against that 'never, no, never'. Since then, of course, I have had to put up with quite a few "petites misères de la vie humaine," [life's little troubles] which, had they been written about in a book, might well have served to amuse some people, but which if one experiences them oneself must be deemed anything but pleasant.

However, to this day I am glad that I left the resignation - or the "how not to do it" method - to those who have a mind for it and for myself kept in good heart. You will understand that in case like this it is surprisingly difficult to tell what one can, may and must do. Yet 'we pick up the scent as we wander about, not as we sit idly by.'

One of the reasons why I have not written to you about all this before is that my position was so uncertain and unsettled that I was unable to explain it to you. Now, however, we have reached the point where I have spoken about it, not only to her but to Father and Mother, to Uncle and Aunt Stricker and to our Uncle and Aunt at Prinsenhage.

The only one to say to me, and that very informally and privately, that there really might be a chance for me if I worked hard and made progress, was someone from whom I least expected it, Uncle Cent. He was pleased with the way in which I reacted to Kee's "never no, never", that is not making heavy weather of it but taking it in quite good humour, and said for

instance, 'Don't give grist to the never, no, never mills which Kee has set up, I wish her all the best, but I rather hope those mills will go bankrupt.'

Similarly, I didn't take it amiss when Uncle Stricker said that there was the danger that I might be severing friendly relationships and old ties'. Whereupon I said that in my view the real issue, far from severing old ties, was to see if the old ones could not be renewed where they were in need of repair.



89. *Outskirts of Paris near Montmartre*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Watercolour on paper,  
39.5 x 53.5 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.



90. *Outskirts of Paris*,  
Paris, autumn 1886.  
Oil on canvas on cardboard,  
45.7 x 54.6 cm. Private Collection.





91. *The Moulin de la Galette*,  
Paris, autumn 1886. Oil on canvas,  
55 x 38.5 cm. Collection of Charles W. Engelhard.



92. *The Hill of Montmartre*,  
Paris, autumn 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 36 x 61 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

Anyway, that is what I hope to go on doing, and cast out despondency and gloom, meanwhile working hard - and ever since I met her, I have been getting on much better with my work.

I told you that the position has now become more clear cut. 1st. - Kee says never, no, never and then - I have the feeling that I'm going to have an immense amount of difficulty with the older people, who consider the matter settled and done with now and will try to force me to drop it.

For the time being, however, I think they'll go about it very gently, keeping me dangling and fobbing me off with fair words until Uncle and Aunt Stricker's big celebration (in December) is over [their silver wedding anniversary]. I fear they will be taking measures to get rid of me.

Forgive me for expressing myself somewhat harshly in order to make the position clear to you. I admit that the colours are somewhat glaring and the lines somewhat starkly drawn, but that will give you a clearer insight into the affair than if I were to beat about the bush. So do not suspect me of lacking in respect for the older people.

However, I do believe that they are positively against it and I wanted to make that clear to you. They will try to make sure that Kee and I neither see or speak or write to each other, because they know very well that if we saw, spoke or wrote to each other, there would be a chance of Kee changing her mind. Kee herself thinks she will never change her mind, the older people are trying to convince me that she cannot change it, and yet they fear such a change.

The older people will change their minds about this affair, not when Kee changes her attitude but when I have become somebody who earns at least 1000 guilders a year. Once again, forgive me the hard contours with which I am outlining matters. If I receive a little sympathy from the older ones, I believe that some of the younger ones will be able to understand my position.

You may, Theo - you may hear it said of me that I want to force things, and expressions like that. Yet everyone knows how senseless force is in love. No, nothing is further from my thoughts.

But it is neither unfair nor unreasonable to wish that Kee and I, instead of not being allowed any contact with each other, might see, speak or write to each other so that we could come to know each other better, and even be able to tell whether or not we are suited to one another. A year of keeping in

touch with each other would be salutary for her and for me, and yet the older people have really dug in their heels on this point. Were I rich, they would soon change their tune.





93. *The Moulin de la Galette*,  
Paris, autumn 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 38.5 x 46 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

But now you will realise that I hope to leave no stone unturned that might bring me closer to her, and that is my intention:

To go on loving her

Until in the end she loves me too.

Plus elle disparaît plus elle apparaît. [The more she disappears the more she appears.]

Theo, are you by any chance in love as well? I hope you are, for believe me, even 'petites misères' have their value. One is sometimes in despair, there are moments when one is in hell, so to speak, yet there is also something different and better about it.

There are three stages.

1. Not loving and not being loved.
2. Loving and not being loved (the present case).
3. Loving and being loved.

Now, I tell you that the second stage is better than the first, but the third! That's it!

Well, old boy, go and fall in love yourself and tell me about it some time. Keep your own counsel in the present case and have some sympathy for me. Of course I would much rather have had a yea and amen, but I am almost pleased with my n' ever, no, never'. (I take it for something, although older and wiser heads say it is nothing.)

Rappard has been here, and brought some watercolours that are coming on well. Mauve will be calling soon, I hope, otherwise I shall go to him. I am doing a good deal of drawing and have the feeling it is improving; I am working much more with the brush than before. It is so cold now that I do almost nothing but indoor figure drawing, a seamstress, a basket-weaver, etc.

A handshake in my thoughts and write soon and believe me,

Ever yours,

Vincent

If you ever do fall in love and get a never, no, never, don't resign yourself to it whatever you do! But you are such a lucky dog that nothing like that will ever happen to you, I hope.

They tried to make me promise that I would speak or write absolutely nothing more about this business, but I refused to promise that. In my opinion no one in the world should in fairness demand such a thing of me (or of anyone else in the same position). All I did was to give Uncle Cent the

assurance that for the time being I would cease writing to Uncle Stricker unless unforeseen circumstances should necessitate it. A lark cannot help singing in the spring.



94. *Self-Portrait in a Felt Hat at the Easel*,  
Paris, spring 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 46.5 x 38.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





95. *Self-Portrait*,  
Paris, spring 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 38 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



96. *Portrait of Père Tanguy*,  
Paris, winter 1886-1887. Oil on canvas,  
47 x 38.5 cm. Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.





97. *Self-Portrait*,  
Paris, autumn 1887. Oil on canvas,  
44.1 x 35.1 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**The Hague, 29 December 1881**

Dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter and the enclosed. I was in Etten again when I received it; as I told you, I had arranged this with Mauve. But now you see I am back again in The Hague. On Christmas Day I had a violent scene with Father, and it went so far that Father told me I had better leave the house. Well, he said it so decidedly that I actually left the same day.

The real reason was that I did not go to church, and also that if going to church was compulsory and if I was forced to go, I certainly should never go again out of courtesy, as I had done rather regularly all the time I was in Etten. But oh, in truth there was much more at the back of it all, including the whole story of what happened this summer between Kee and me.

I do not remember ever having been in such a rage in my life. I frankly said that I thought their whole system of religion horrible, and just because I had gone too deeply into those questions during a miserable period in my life, I did not want to think of them any more, and must keep clear of them as of something fatal.

Was I too angry, too violent? Maybe - but even so, it is settled now, once and for all.

I went back to Mauve and said, "Listen, Mauve, I cannot stay in Etten any longer, and I must go and live somewhere else, preferably here."

Well, Mauve said, "Then stay."

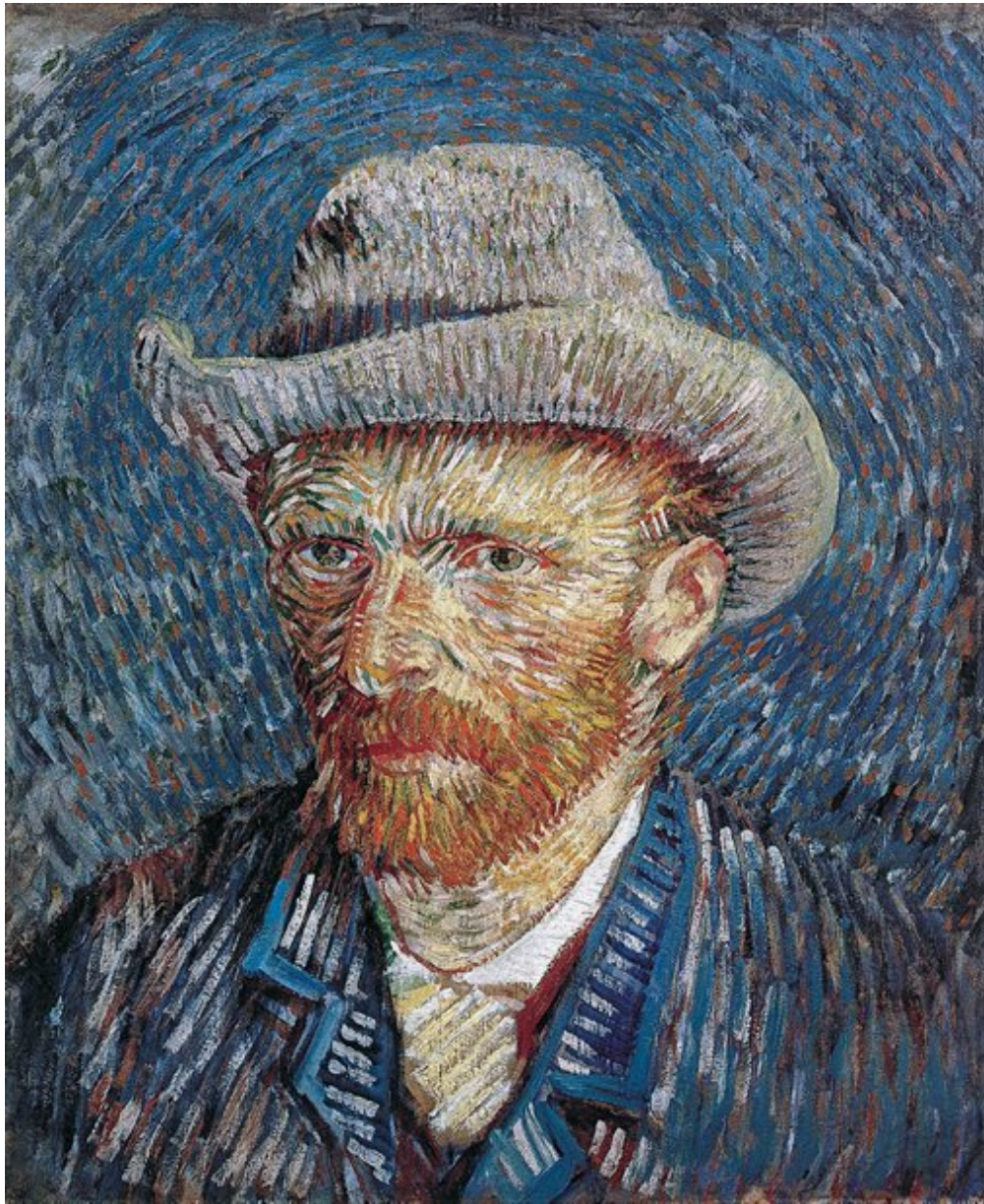
And so I have rented a studio here, that is, a room and an alcove which can be arranged for the purpose, cheap enough, on the outskirts of the town, in Schenkweg, ten minutes from Mauve. Father said if I wanted money, he would lend it to me if necessary, but this is impossible now, I must be quite independent of Father. How? I do not know yet, but Mauve will help me if necessary, and I hope and believe you will too, and of course I will work and try as hard as I can to earn something.

I am in for it now, and the die is cast. At an inconvenient moment, but how can it be helped?

I must have some simple furniture, and besides, all my expenses for drawing and painting materials will increase.

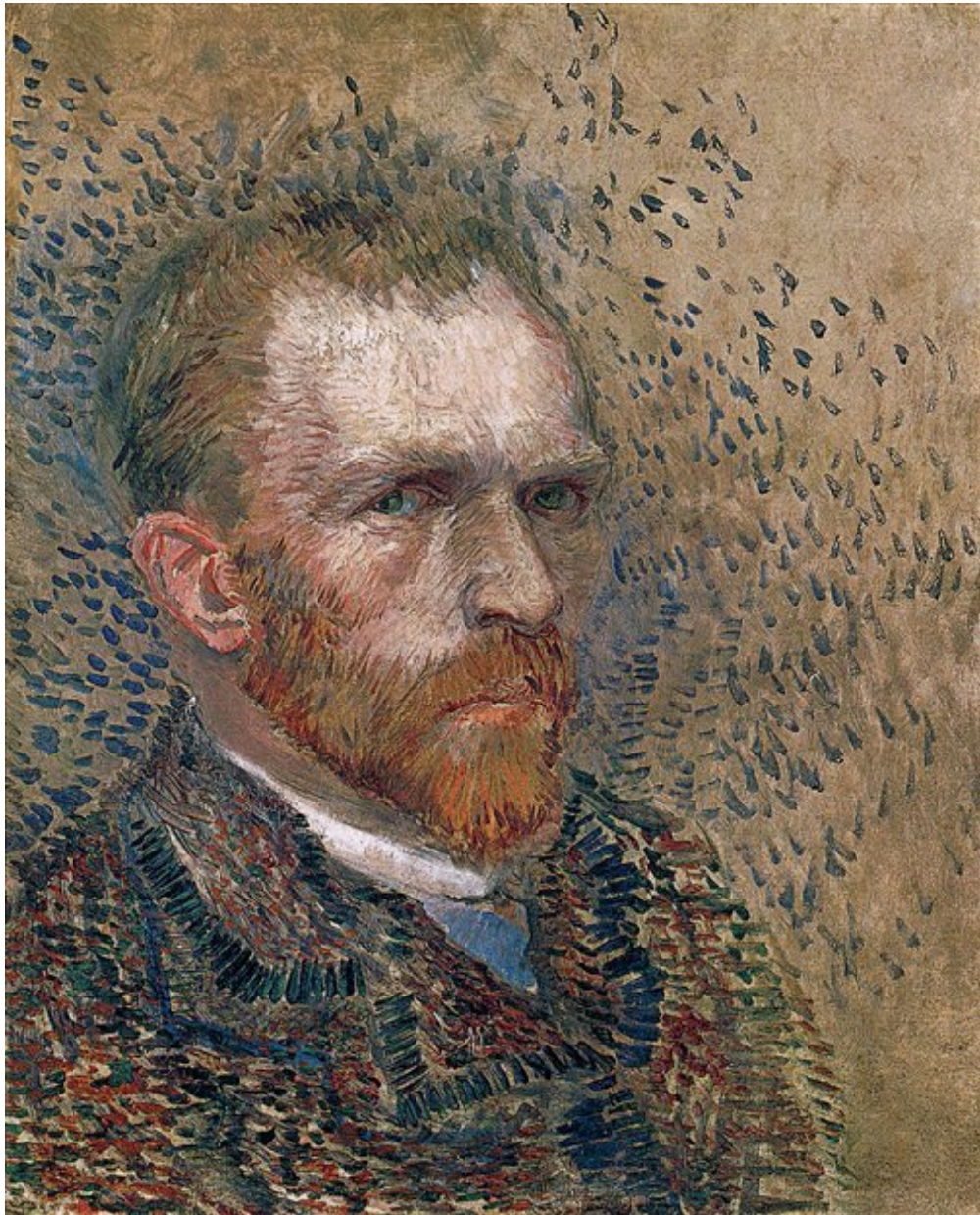
I must also try to dress somewhat better.





98. *Self-Portrait with Felt Hat*,  
Paris, winter 1887-1888. Oil on canvas,  
44 x 37.5 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





99. *Self-Portrait*,  
Paris, spring or summer 1887.  
Oil on cardboard, 41 x 33 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

It is a risky affair, a question of sink or swim. But someday I should have had to set myself up, so what shall I say? It has happened sooner than I expected. As to the relation between Father and me, that will not be redressed so very easily. The difference in our views and opinions is too great. It will be a hard pull for me; the tide rises high, almost to the lips, and perhaps higher still - how can I know? But I will fight my battle, and sell my life dearly, and try to win and get the best of it.

January 1 I shall move into the new studio. I will take the simplest furniture, a wooden table and a few chairs. I would be satisfied with a blanket on the floor instead of a bed. But Mauve wants me to get a bed, and will lend me the money if necessary.

As you can imagine, I have a great many cares and worries. But still it gives me a feeling of satisfaction to have gone so far that I cannot go back again; and though the path may be difficult, I now see it clearly before me.

Of course I must ask you, Theo, if you will occasionally send me what you can spare without inconveniencing yourself. And send it to me rather than give it to others, for if it is possible, we must not get Mauve mixed up in the financial affairs. His helping me with advice in art matters is already of such enormous value. But he insists on my buying, for instance, a bed and a few pieces of furniture. He says, I will lend you the money if necessary. And according to him I must dress somewhat better and not try to skimp too much.

I will soon write you at greater length. I will not consider it a misfortune that things have gone so far; on the contrary, notwithstanding all kinds of emotions, I feel a certain calm. There is safety in the midst of danger. What would life be if we hadn't courage to attempt anything?

I have been walking around everywhere to find that studio, in town as well as in Scheveningen. Scheveningen is terribly expensive. This studio costs only 7 guilders a month - it's the furniture that makes it so expensive. But once one has a house of one's own, it is a good possession and gives one a more solid footing.

The light comes from the south, but the window is large and high, and I think the room will look very pleasant after a while. You can imagine that I feel quite animated. How will my work be a year from now? If I could only express what I feel! Well, Mauve understands all this, and he will give me as

much technical advice as he can - the things which fill my head and my heart must be expressed in drawings or pictures.

Mauve himself is very busy with a large picture of a fishing smack drawn as far as the dunes by horses.

I think it delightful to be in The Hague, and I find so many beautiful things here, I must try to express something of it. Adieu, boy, a handshake in thought and write soon, believe me,

Yours sincerely, Vincent

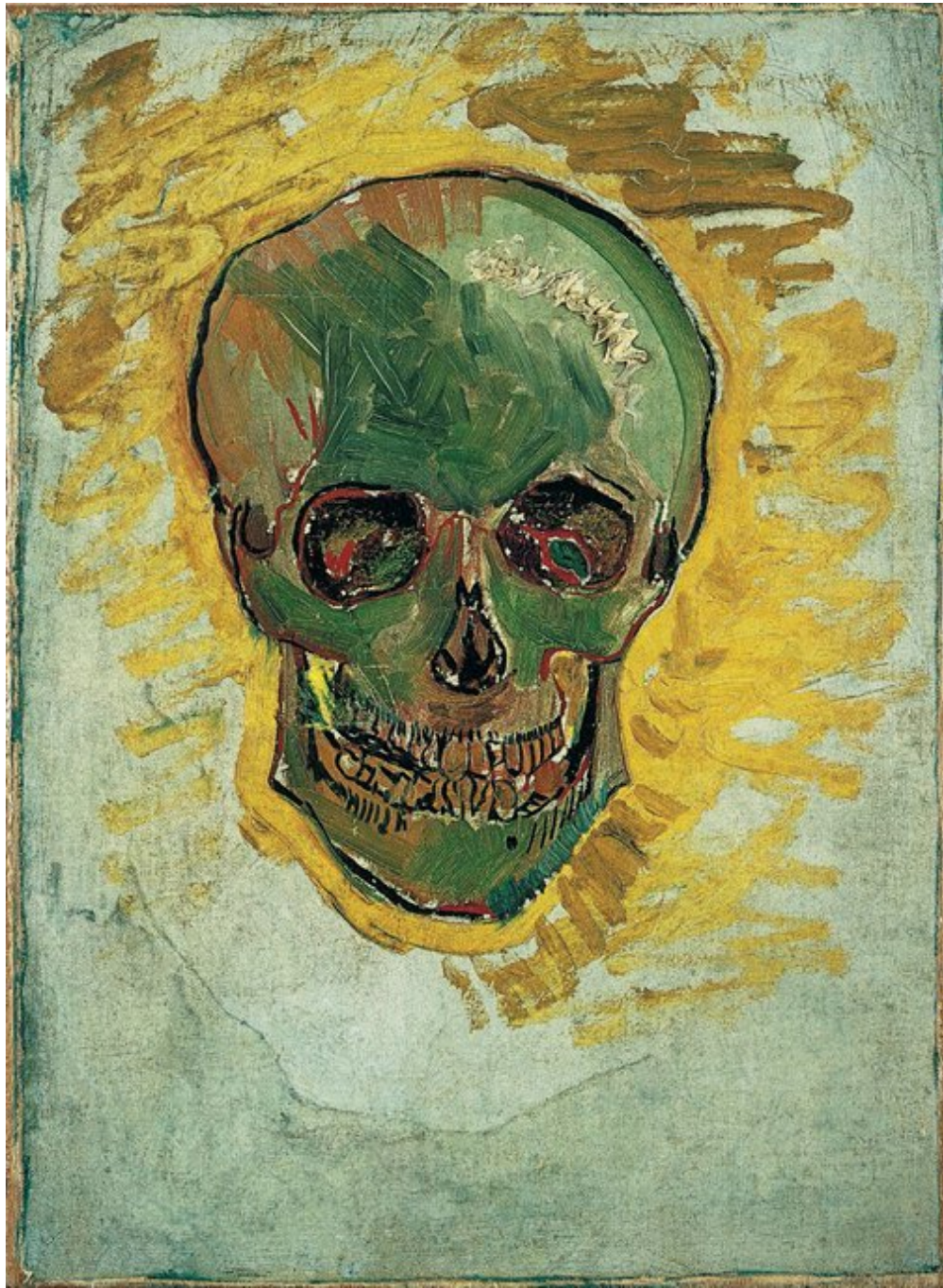
Kind regards from Mauve and Jet.

I have a little money left, but how long will it last? I must stay at the inn until January 1. Address your letters, A. Mauve, Uileboomen 198. I go there almost every day.





100. *A Pair of Shoes*,  
Paris, first half of 1886. Oil on canvas,  
37.5 x 45 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



101. *Skull*,  
Paris, winter 1887-1888.  
Oil on canvas, 41.5 x 31.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





102. *Skull of a Skeleton with Burning Cigarette*,  
Antwerp, winter 1885-1886.  
Oil on canvas, 32.5 x 24 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



103. *Cineraria in a Flowerpot*,  
Paris, July-August 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 54.5 x 46 cm.  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**The Hague, 5-6 January 1882**

Dear brother,

Listen, Theo, what's the matter with you?

Didn't you receive my last letter, in which I told you what happened at home, and how in consequence I left the house and went back to The Hague and am now settled in my own studio: address Schenkweg No. 138 (near Rynspoor station)?

You know Mauve helped me to get settled, but I still have a great many expenses, and for the last few days I really have not had a penny in my pocket. Of course I had counted positively on your sending me at least 100 frs. for the month of January.

But up to now I have not received anything, not even a letter from you. The worst is that I cannot work with a model until I have some money in my pocket again, so I can hardly do anything, as the weather is too bad to sit outside, though I tried it several times.

I am all right, but the last few days I have been faint with suspense. I have been looking for models, and found a few, but I cannot take them.

In desperation I went today to Goupil's, for according to what you wrote me I thought as a last resort I would ask Tersteeg to lend me something. But Tersteeg had just gone out of town for a few days.

I must put a good face on the matter when I'm with Mauve; Mauve has really done enough.

Tersteeg had promised to come to see me, but he has not been here yet. If for some reason or other you cannot send the 100 frs. at once, send me at least part of it by return mail.

I found a stamp in my pocket just now, otherwise I should not be able to send you this letter. It is a time of struggle for you and for me, but I think we are making progress. So let us keep courage. Adieu, with a handshake,

Yours sincerely, Vincent



104. *Bouquet of Flowers*,  
Paris, August-September 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 94 x 51 cm.  
Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich.



105. *Vase with Gladioli*,  
Paris, late summer 1886. Oil on canvas,  
48.5 x 40 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh  
Nuenen, early January 1885**

Theo,

Although I appreciate your proposal to add to the monthly sum of 100 francs, requested by me, 50 francs monthly by way of compensation to Father for my living expenses at home, I most decidedly decline this (the 50 francs, I mean).

You may look upon my having been at home so long without paying for my board as arrogance or indiscretion on my part. I did this for the sake of my progress in painting, and have not profited from it personally, inasmuch as I still have to pay a rather heavy bill for colours, an extra expense. For the rest, I acknowledge that after all it has been advantageous to me. The reason why I cannot regard the present moment as propitious for making a kind of contract with Father is that under the circumstances it cannot be my intention to stay here much longer. Which I should very much like to do, but I am afraid it will prove impossible.

If, however, you should want to make an arrangement with Father of the kind indicated in your letter, then leave me out of it - in other words, let it be purely a matter between you and Father, in which I am not involved.

So that I for my part may go on considering it an indiscretion in any case, I mean the fact that I live here, also if you should make a payment.

As soon as I am well again, I shall probably go and live in the studio, at least in the daytime.

It is too much for me to lose you to a certain extent, and to have to pay for my board besides. Gradually I shall try to find other resources of my own. If it gives you any satisfaction to know that what you call "my plans for the future" have practically fallen through, thrive on the thought. But this is no reason for me to approve of your views, so that I am forced to repeat that I continue to think them bad. I cannot give up the studio, I must have some fixed place to work in, and in no event can they demand that I leave the village. However, my having to expect this, and my having to be prepared for it, is the cause of my regretting the fact that I did not already see last year that our arrangement was untenable for both of us.

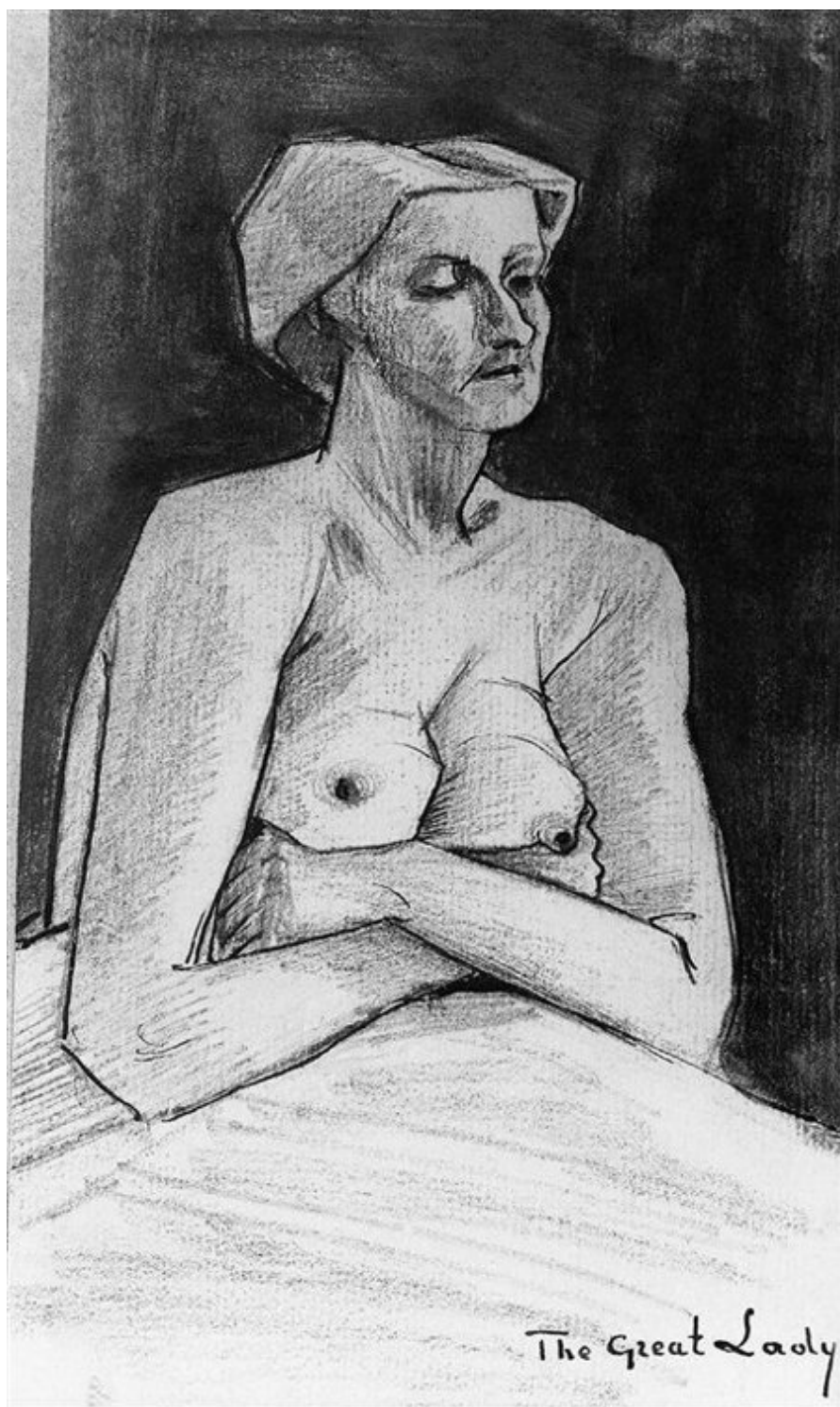
Goodbye.

Vincent





106. *Portrait of a Woman in Profile*,  
Antwerp, December 1885.  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 50 cm.  
Private Collection, New York.



107. *The Great Lady*,  
The Hague, April 1882. Oil on canvas.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



108. *Woman ("Sien") seated near the Stove*,  
The Hague, March-April 1882.  
Pencil, pen and brush in black ink (faded to brown in parts)  
and white opaque watercolour on  
laid paper (two sheets), 50 x 61 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





109. *Mother by a Cradle, Portrait of Leonie Rose Davy-Charbuy*,  
Paris, spring 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 45.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



I must protest against the underlined expression in your letter, which I copy: a“nd I therefore request you to accept the 150 francs, which I shall go on sending you, according to our agreement when we were good friends, and to give 50 francs to Father, which we both approved of.”

I protest against this: it is not true that “when we were good friends” it was agreed upon between us that I should pay 50 francs. I clearly remember the conversation - in the garden - about this matter, and far from agreeing to anything, I did not want to make any agreement in this direction on that occasion, and the upshot was that I pointed out rather emphatically that I wanted money in order to undertake a number of larger canvases I had in mind, and that I had expenses enough besides. If anything was agreed upon, it was meant for later, when I should be in a more favourable position.

This letter is meant to tell you explicitly that I utterly refuse to have anything to do with any agreement you might make with Father on the possible payment of board.

In order to clarify any misunderstanding as to the payment of 50 francs for board, let Father read your letter of today and this one. I do not want to hear anything further about this affair; settle it with Father. I say once again that it is not true that I agreed to pay 50 francs for board - if I had agreed to, I should have kept my promise, but I remember the whole conversation about it, and it's simply the opposite of what I told you - namely that for the time being I had to pay for so many other things that I could not do it yet.

If I should drop dead - which I should not try to evade if it happened, but which I should not seek expressly - you would be standing on a skeleton, and this would be a damned insecure standpoint. As long, however, as I am alive and painting, well, you may expect a feeling of gratitude and of obligation from me - but - seeing that I feel that I must carry on my work vigorously, and that otherwise I shall not be able to stick it out, I dare speak to you about what is wrong. If you did not listen to this at the time, and after that began to think ill of me - it may well be that this feeling was not analyzed incorrectly by you - and might really have been a presentiment of something that - not through any fault of mine, but in consequence of your own act and state of mind - might come to pass, and that we should do well to avoid, very much so. Let's separate, old fellow, for a time, as friends, that will do no harm, neither to you nor to me. Staying together would end badly if things went on like this. I dare say, if you were to make a more correct

analysis of your own feelings, what you call “suspicion” may really have been something quite different. I mean a kind of presentiment that something was going to happen between you and me - and that otherwise things would not go well. You are in an elevated position, but this is no reason for being suspicious of those who are standing on low ground —where I stand - and where I intend to say.



110. *View of Paris from Vincent's Bedroom (Lepic Street)*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on cardboard, 46 x 38 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

## Paris: 1886-1888

### *“The spreading of ideas”*

Van Gogh had been living in the French capital for nearly half a year when he wrote to Horace M. Levens, an English painter he had met in Antwerp:

“And mind my dear fellow, Paris is Paris. There is but one Paris and however hard living may be here, and if it became worse and harder even – the French air clears up the brain and does you good – a world of good.”[\[65\]](#)

He had arrived unexpectedly in March, 1886. He immediately sent a note to his brother at the gallery:

“My dear Theo, do not be cross with me for having come all at once like this: I have thought about it so much, and I believe that in this way we shall save time. Shall be at the Louvre from midday on or sooner if you like.”[\[66\]](#)

Van Gogh stayed in the capital of the 19th century for two years. Because he was living with his most significant correspondent, this chapter of his life is poorly documented. The cohabitation of the two brothers was not without its conflicts.

“There was a time, where I thought much of Vincent and where he was my best friend, but this is over now.” Theo complained to his sister Willemien that: “From his point of view it seems to be even worse, because he doesn’t miss an occasion to let me know that he despises and detests me. For that reason my home has become intolerable. No one comes to see me anymore because of his reproaches, and also because the house is so dirty that it is not very inviting.”[\[67\]](#)

The brothers eventually overcame this crisis, and drew closer than ever before. After Vincent’s departure, Theo again wrote to his sister:

“It is unbelievable, how much he knows and what a bright view he has upon the world... Through him I got in contact with many painters who worship him a lot... Anyway, he has got such a big heart that he is always longing to do something for other people.”[\[68\]](#)

Vincent opened his brother’s eyes not only to new painters and paintings, but also to the world of music: “Though I don’t know much about it, I like to listen to music, but here one can seldom hear something good without going to concerts. But before Vincent left, I sometimes went with him to Wagner concerts, and we both liked it a lot. It is disconcerting for me, that he is gone; at the end he was so much to me.”[\[69\]](#) Vincent continued to study the French literature that had excited him for such a long time: “The work of the French naturalists, Zola, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, de Goncourt, Richepin, Daudet, Huysmans, is magnificent, and one can hardly be said to belong to one’s time if one has paid no attention to it.”[\[70\]](#)



To van Gogh, Paris offered a time for reflection and a time for painting. It was there that he first saw the Impressionist canvases, of which Theo had written so often. He found work in the studio of Fernand Cormon, whose liberal way of teaching and disdain for the beaten track of the salons attracted many young painters. Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Emile Bernard also worked in Cormon's studio, and both befriended van Gogh.

Another student, François Gauzi, recalled that:

“When van Gogh entered the Cormon atelier, he wanted to be called only by his first name, and for a long time we didn't know his real last name. He was an excellent companion who had to be left in peace... When discussing 'art', if one disagreed with him and pushed him to the limit, he would flare up in a disturbing way... He worked with a disorderly fury, throwing colours on the canvas with feverish speed. He gathered up the colour as though with a shovel, and the gobs of paint, covering the length of the paintbrush, stuck to his fingers. When the model rested, he didn't stop painting. The violence of his study surprised the atelier; the classically-oriented remained bewildered by it.”[\[71\]](#)



111. *Boulevard de Clichy*,  
Paris, February-March 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 45.5 x 55 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

Even more than the studio, the colour store of Julien Tanguy fascinated the young painter. Over his wife's protests, the proprietor occasionally let his customers pay for their supplies with paintings. Tanguy's store thus became something of a gallery, where the painters met to see the work of their colleagues. It was here that van Gogh came to know Paul Gauguin, whose paintings he greatly admired. The Scottish painter Archibald Standish Hartrick offers this impression of the conversations in Père Tanguy's store: van Gogh "was particularly pleased with a theory that the eye carried a portion of the last sensation it had enjoyed into the next, so that something of both must be included in every picture made. The difficulty was to decide what were the proper sensations, so coloured, to combine together. An obvious instance of this sort of idea will be found in the fact that the entering of a lamplit room out of the night increases the orange effect of the light, and in the contrary case, the blue. Hence, to depict it properly, according to the theory, it was necessary in the former case to include some blue into the picture and in the latter some orange. Van Gogh would roll his eyes and hiss through his teeth with gusto, as he brought out the words 'blue', 'orange' – complementary colours of course." [\[72\]](#)

The effects of colour also prompted van Gogh's interest in the Japanese woodcuts he had first encountered in Antwerp. He had a sizable collection of these prints in Paris, and organised an exhibition of them in the café "Tambourin" that aroused considerable interest among his

contemporaries. A show of his own works ended, however, with trouble: the landlady of the “Tambourin” refused to return the paintings because van Gogh had not paid his bills in the café. The self portrait was the main subject of van Gogh’s work from 1886 to 1888. In one canvas, he represents himself as a painter, with brush and palette. In the Paris that he once called a “spreading of ideas,” [73] he found his way. In the summer of 1887, he wrote to his sister Willemien:

“In every man who is healthy and natural there is a germinating force as in a grain of wheat. And so natural life is germination. What the germinating force is in the grain of wheat, love is in us... My own adventures are restricted chiefly to making swift progress toward growing into a little old man, you know, with wrinkles, and a tough beard and a number of false teeth, and so on. But what does it matter? I have a dirty and hard profession – painting – and if I were not what I am, I should not paint; but being what I am, I often work with pleasure, and in the hazy distance I see the possibility of making pictures in which there will be some youth and freshness, even though my own youth is one of the things I have lost... It is my intention as soon as possible to go temporarily to the South, where there is even more colour, even more sun. But the thing I hope to achieve is to paint a good portrait. But never mind.” [74]





112. *View of Paris from Vincent's Bedroom (Lepic Street)*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on cardboard, 46 x 38.2 cm.  
Private Collection.





113. *Asnières Bridge*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas, 53 x 73 cm.  
The Menil Collection, Houston.

## **Letters from Theo van Gogh to His Family Paris, 1885 – 1887**

Extracts from family letters 1885 - 1887, Paris

**Theo to Lies**

**13th October 1885**

The more people one meets, the more one sees that they hide behind conventional forms of conversation, and that what they say when they pretend to be honest, is often so empty and so false. Bonger, who is a good friend, is different, and we often say to each other that although we meet many people, we meet so few people who we find sympathetic.

You ask me about Vincent. He is one of those people who has seen the world from nearby and has retreated from it. We shall now have to wait and see whether he has genius. I do believe it, and a few others with me, amongst them Bonger. Once his work becomes good he will become a great man. As to success, it may go with him as with Heyerdahl, valued by some but not understood by the masses. Those, however, who really care whether there is actually something in an artist or whether it is just tinsel will respect him, and in my opinion, that will be sufficient revenge for the displeasure expressed by so many.

**Theo to mother**

**2nd half June 1886**

Fortunately we're doing well in our new apartment. You would not recognize Vincent, he has changed so much, and it strikes other people even more than it does me. He has undergone an important operation in his mouth, for he had lost almost all his teeth through the bad condition of his stomach. The doctor says that he has now quite recovered.

**Theo to mother**

**July 1886**

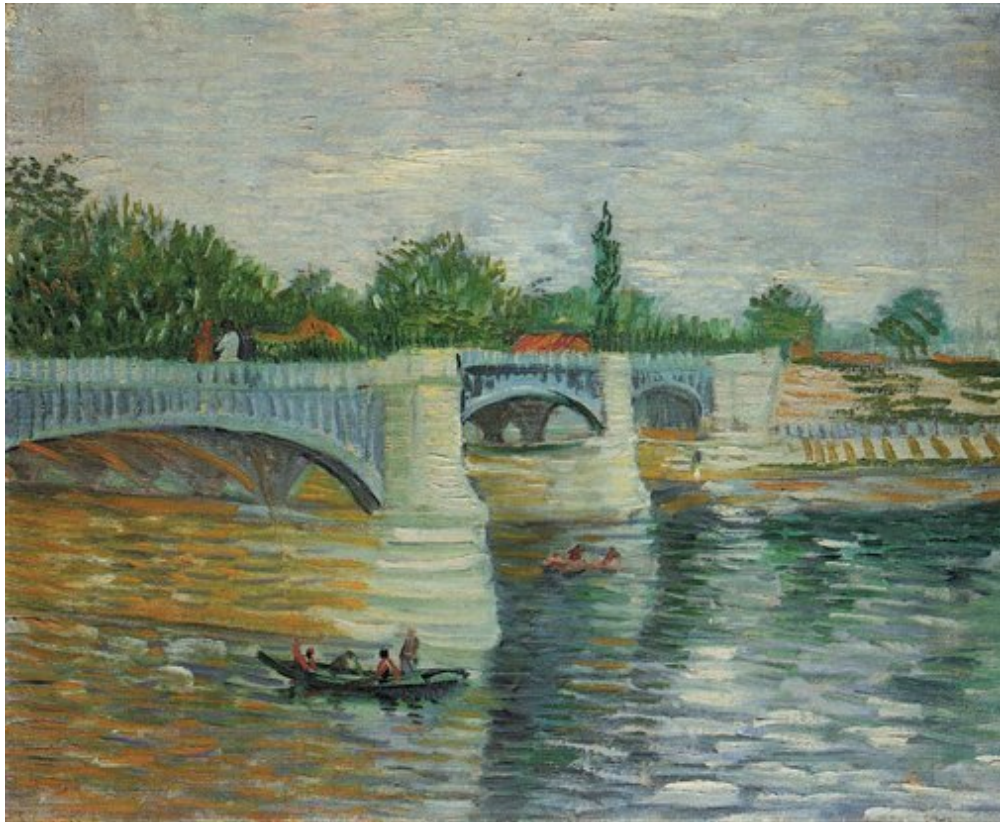
He is progressing tremendously in his work and this is proved by the fact that he is becoming successful. He has not yet sold paintings for money, but is exchanging his work for other pictures. In that way we obtain a fine collection, which, of course, also has a certain value. There is a picture dealer who has now taken four of his paintings and has promised to arrange for an exhibition of his work next year. He is mainly painting flowers - with the object to put more lively colour into his next set of pictures. He is also

more cheerful than in the past and people here like him. To give you proof: hardly a day passes that he is not asked to go to the studios of well-known painters, or they come to see him. He also has acquaintances who give him a bunch of flowers every week which may serve him as models. If we are able to keep it up, I think his difficult times are over and he will be able to make it by himself.



114. *A Barge near Asnières*,  
Paris, summer 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 19 x 27 cm. Collection of  
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon,  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.





115. *The Seine with the Pont de la Grande Jatte*,  
Paris, summer 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 32 x 40.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Theo to mother****February 1887**

He has painted a few portraits which have turned out well, but he always does them for no payment. It is a pity that he does not seem to want to earn something, for if he did he could make some money here; well, you can't change a person.

**Theo to brother Cor****11 March 1887**

Vincent continues his studies and he works with talent. But it is a pity that he has so much difficulty with his character, for in the long run it is quite impossible to get on with him. When he came here last year he was difficult, it is true, but I thought I could see some progress. But now he is his old self again and he won't listen to reason. That does not make it too pleasant here at home and I hope for a change. That change will come, but it is a pity for him, for if we had worked together it would have been better for both of us.

... Have you heard they are going to make an iron tower 300 meters high here? That must mean a lot of work. It seems it has been terribly difficult to figure out in what way it would be possible to keep it standing, and the designer [Eiffel] tells us that ten years ago it would have not been possible to make that calculation.

**Theo to Wil****14 March 1887**

I cannot tell you how much good your latest letter has done me. In difficult days it is so much to know that there is someone who wants to help bring things to a good end and I am often ungrateful enough to imagine that I stand all alone and then the difficulties seem insurmountable and it seems there is no way out. Your letter proves to me that I am wrong. This is such a special case. If he was someone who had a different kind of job, I would certainly have done what you advised me a long time ago, and I have often asked myself whether it was not wrong always to help him; I have often been on the verge of letting him muddle along by himself.

After getting your letter I again seriously thought about it and I feel that in the circumstances I cannot do anything but continue. It is certain that he is an artist and what he makes now may sometimes not be beautiful, but it will surely be of use to him later and then it may possibly be sublime, and it would be a shame if one kept him from his regular studies. However

impractical he may be, as he becomes more skilful the day will undoubtedly come when he will start selling.

You should not think that it is the money side that worries me the most. It is mostly the idea that we sympathise so little any more. There was a time when I loved Vincent a lot and he was my best friend but that is over now.



116. *The Moulin de la Galette*,  
Paris, March 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 47 x 39 cm.  
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh.





117. *Restaurant de la Sirène, Asnières*,  
Paris, spring 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 52 x 64.4 cm.  
The Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford.

It seems to be even worse from his side, for he never loses an opportunity to show me that he despises me and that I revolt him. That makes the situation at home almost unbearable. Nobody wants to come and see me, for that always leads to reproaches and he is also so dirty and untidy that the household looks far from attractive. All I hope is that he will go and live by himself, and he has talked about this for a long time, but if I told him to leave that would only give him a reason to stay on. Since I cannot do any good for him I only ask for one thing and that is that he won't do any harm to me and that is what he does by staying, for it weighs heavily on me.

It appears as if there are two different beings in him, the one marvellously gifted, fine and delicate, and the other selfish and heartless. They appear alternately so that one hears him talk now this way and then that way and always with arguments to prove pro and contra. It is a pity he is his own enemy, for he makes life difficult not only for others but also for himself.

I have firmly decided to continue as I have done up to now, but I hope that for some reason or another he will move to other quarters, and I will do my best for that.

**Theo to Lies**

**19 April 1887**

I don't remember when I wrote you last and if I have already told you my secret. To get straight to the point, if you don't know yet, I am planning at one time or another to ask for Jo Bonger's hand. I surely don't know her enough to be able to tell you much about her. As you know, I have only seen her a few times, but the things I know about her appeal to me. She gives me the impression that I could trust her in a completely indefinable way, more than anyone else. I think I could talk with her about anything and I believe that if she wanted it, she could mean very much to me. It is extremely doubtful whether Johanna would want me.

However, I can't stop thinking of her. She is always with me, and very often I curse the terrible distance that lies between us. Why can't I see her more often and get to know her better, in order to know what she would wish and what she thinks of all kinds of things? How could I possibly get in contact with her in another way than I do now, being in Amsterdam once a year for one or two days, and then: finished? I have thought of beginning to write to her, but that is not possible either at the moment, since I was stupid enough last year not to ask her if she wanted to correspond with me.

... Don't think that when I don't go into details it is all other people's fault. No, the main reason was that I was ill, especially mentally, and that I had a hard struggle with myself.

**Theo to Wil**

**26 April 1887**

A lot has changed since I last wrote you. We have made peace, for it did not do anybody any good to continue in that way, I hope it will last. So there will be no change and I am glad. It would have been strange for me to live alone again and he would not have gained anything either. I asked him to stay. That will seem strange after all I wrote you recently, but it is no weakness on my side and as I feel much stronger than this winter, I am confident that I will be able to create an improvement in our relationship. We have drifted apart enough than that it would not serve any purpose to make the rift any larger.

**Theo to Lies**

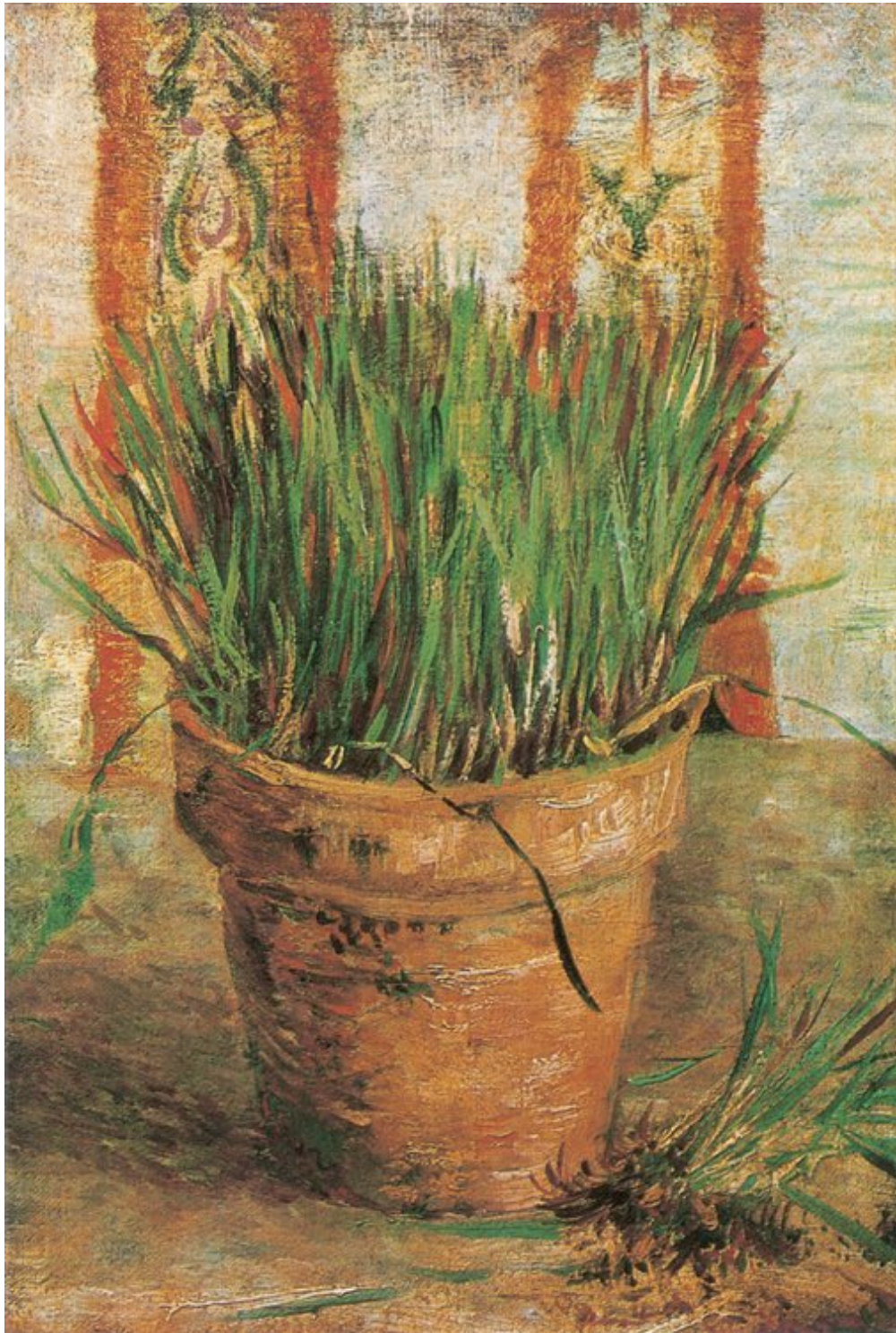
**15 May 1887**

Vincent is working hard as always and keeps progressing. His paintings are becoming lighter and he is trying very hard to put more sunlight into them. He is a curious chap, but what a head he has got, most enviable.



118. *The Kingfisher*,  
Paris, second half of 1886.  
Oil on canvas, 19 x 26.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





119. *Flowerpot with Chives*,  
Paris, March-April 1887. Oil on canvas,  
31.5 x 22 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Paris, c. 1 March 1886**

My dear Theo,

Don't be angry with me for arriving out of the blue. I've given it so much thought and I'm sure we'll gain time this way. Shall be at the Louvre from midday onwards, or earlier if you like.

Please let me know what time you can get to the Salle Carrée. As far as expenses are concerned, I repeat that it won't make much difference. I still have some money left, of course, and I want to talk to you before spending any of it. We'll sort everything out, you'll see.

So come as soon as you can. I shake your hand,

Ever yours, Vincent

[Vincent had arrived unexpectedly in Paris from Antwerp, scribbled this note in French with a piece of black crayon at the station and sent it to Theo by a porter. Theo had wanted him to wait till June, when he could rent a larger apartment. He stayed with Theo in the Rue de Laval, and moved with him in June to the Rue Lepic, in Montmartre.]



120. *Vegetable Gardens and the Moulin  
de Blute-Fin on Montmartre,*  
Paris, February-March 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 44.8 x 81 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





121. *Street Scene in Montmartre: Le Moulin à poivre*,  
Paris, February-March 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 35 x 64.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





122. *Shed with Sunflowers*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Pen, pencil  
and watercolour, 30.5 x 23.9 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

## **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**

### **Paris, August 1886**

Dear Theo,

This morning we got your letter. We think that it is already something that you have broached the subject - and broken the ice as you have spoken about it with the Hollandsche heeren [Dutch gentlemen], etc. And I do not think that my "she will soon be hysteric" was wrong; I myself see that hysteria in the future. And as to the immediate present, you will remember that I said to you: meet with a refusal this time if necessary, but then in any case the subject is broached - and then there will have to follow a second trip to Holland by Bonger and you together. For the time being there is every reason to say with Father Pangloss: *tout est pour le miex dans le meilleur des mondes*. [Everything is for the best in the best of worlds.]

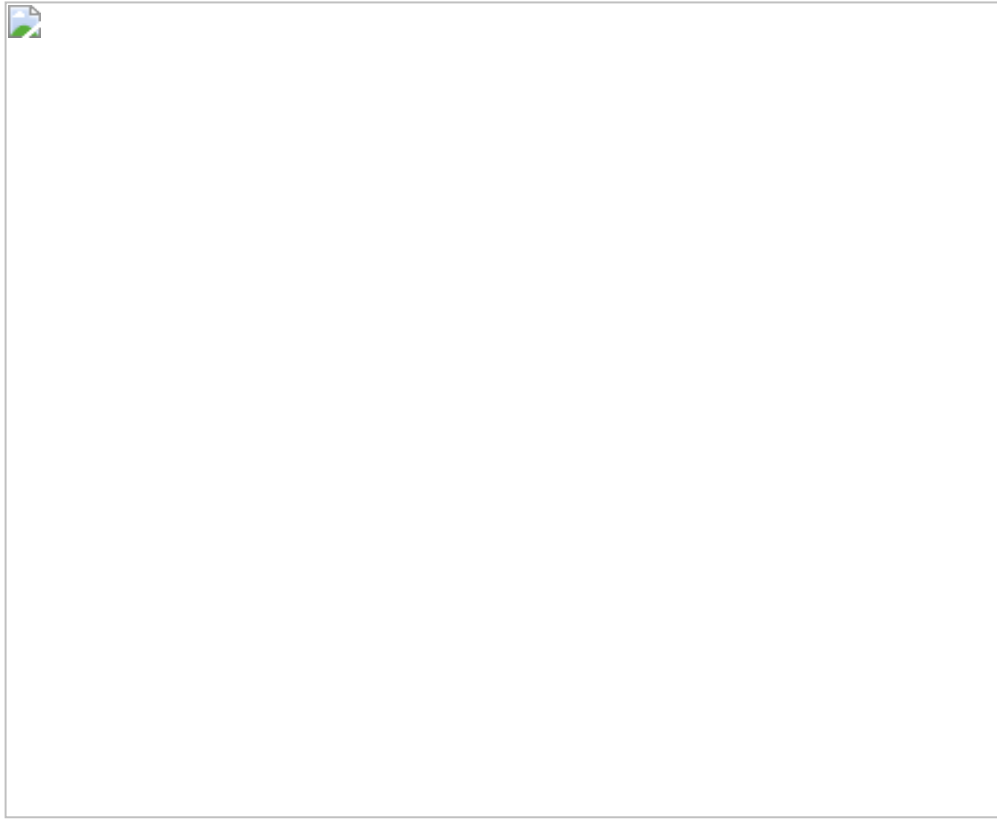
But, old fellow, the solution to the S. problem which you mention in today's letter, namely "either she gets out or I get out," would be very succinct and efficacious - if it were practical. But you will run your head against the same difficulties Bonger and I had to face the last few days, and which we are taking the utmost trouble to clear away. These difficulties are of a nature other than you suppose, but this is not the moment to discuss details; we shall tell you all about it as soon as you get back.

That you are not suited to S. and S. is not suited to you is, I think, incontrovertible, as well as that you must part company - but how? It would be a good thing if you accepted the idea that the affair cannot be settled in the way you propose, by treating her harshly you would immediately drive her to suicide or insanity, and the repercussions on you would be sad indeed and leave you a broken man.

So no catastrophes, please! Well, I told Bonger what I told you, namely that you should try and pass her on to somebody else, and I told him more explicitly what my feelings on the subject are that an amicable arrangement, which would seem obvious, could be reached by your passing her on to me. So it is certain that, if you could reconcile yourself to it, and S. too, I am ready to take S. off your bands, preferably without having to marry her, but if the worst comes to the worst even agreeing to an arranged marriage.



123. *Moored Boats*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on canvas, 52 x 65 cm.  
Collection of William Middleton, Aberdeen.



124. *Fishing in Spring, the Pont de Clichy (Asnières)*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on canvas, 49 x 58 cm.  
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.



I am writing this in a few short words in order that you may have time to think things over before your return. As in this way she could keep house for you, and as she would live on what she earns by working, it would be rather a saving of expense than the reverse. Lucie has been given notice; I told her that you could not continue paying her, as it was too expensive, but I have kept her on until your return, so that you may be able to decide what you will do about the housekeeping, and in case the decision cannot be arrived at on the first day, it may be desirable to let the housekeeping continue on the same footing, as far as Lucie is concerned, until you have decided about what to do with S.

If you could agree with this arrangement, the first consequence, as I see it, would be that you would feel a free man, and your own engagement would become *à la vapeur*. Keep courage and be calm!

As for my work, I painted the pendant of those flowers which you have. A branch of white lilies - white, pink, green - against black, something like black Japanese lacquer inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which you know - then a bunch of orange tiger lilies against a blue background, then a bunch of dahlias, violet against a yellow background, and red gladioli in a blue vase against light yellow.

I have read *Bel Ami* by Guy de Maupassant.

Do you know that Bonger is sleeping here as well as S., and these are queer days; at times we are afraid of her, and at other times we are almighty gay and lighthearted. But S. is seriously deranged, and she is not cured yet by a long shot.

However, the moment you meet again, you will both feel that the liaison between S. and you is definitely off and so you need not be afraid of getting tied to her again. But you must talk a lot with her, and try to get her settled down. Please think it over in the interval between now and your return, and remember: *aux grand maux les grands remèdes* (desperate times call for desperate measures).

Bonger is sure to add something to this letter, if he does not write to you directly from his office.

I quite agree to the exchange for two watercolours by Isabey, especially if they are figures. Try to make an exchange for the pendant that I have here, and to get something else with it. I say, would it not be possible to get the Otto Weber from Prinsenhage, that beautiful autumn? I would give them a

series of four in exchange. We need pictures more than drawings, but do what seems best. Love to all at home.

With a handshake,  
Ever yours, Vincent

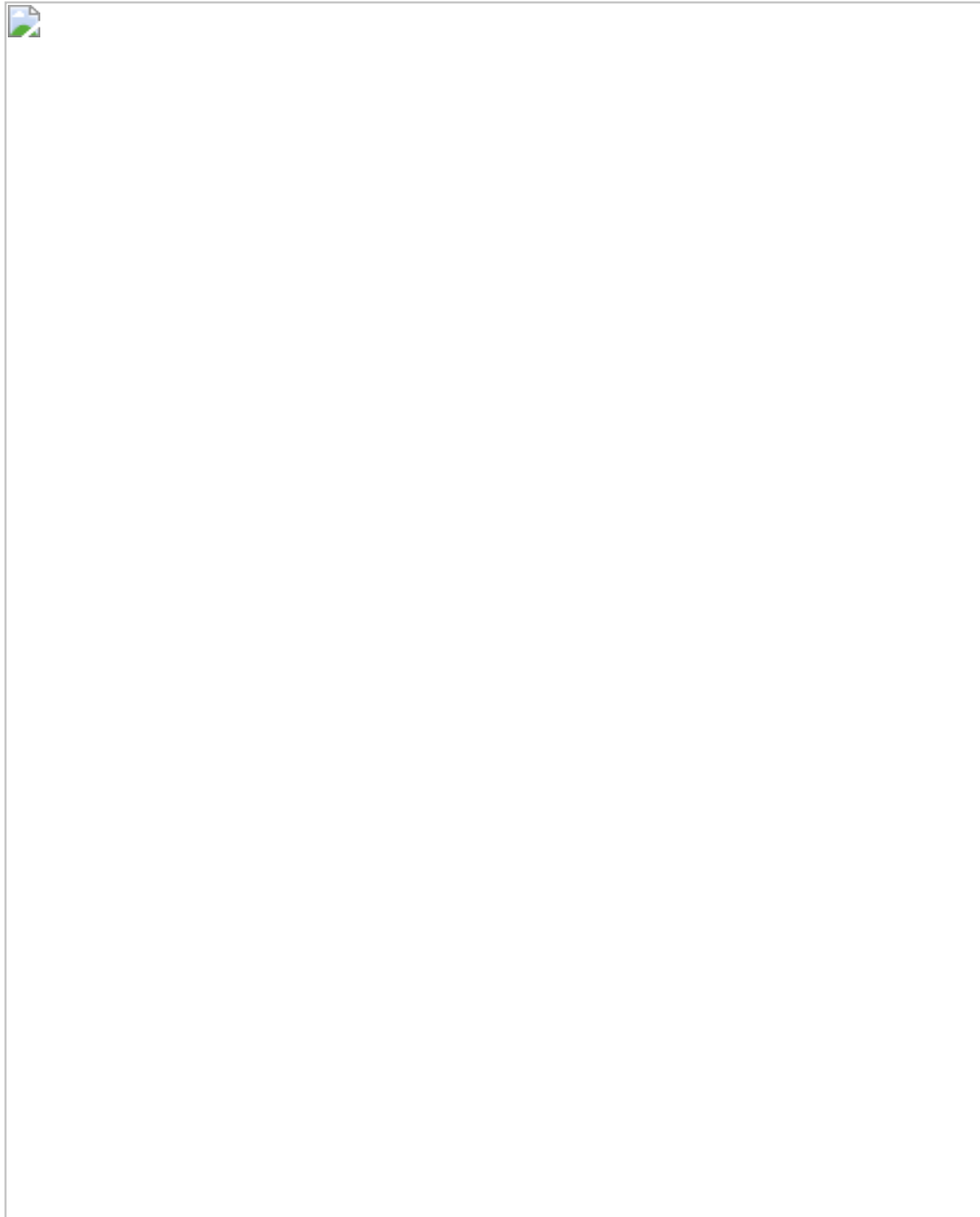


125. *Restaurant de la Sirène at Asnières*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas,  
54.5 x 65.5 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

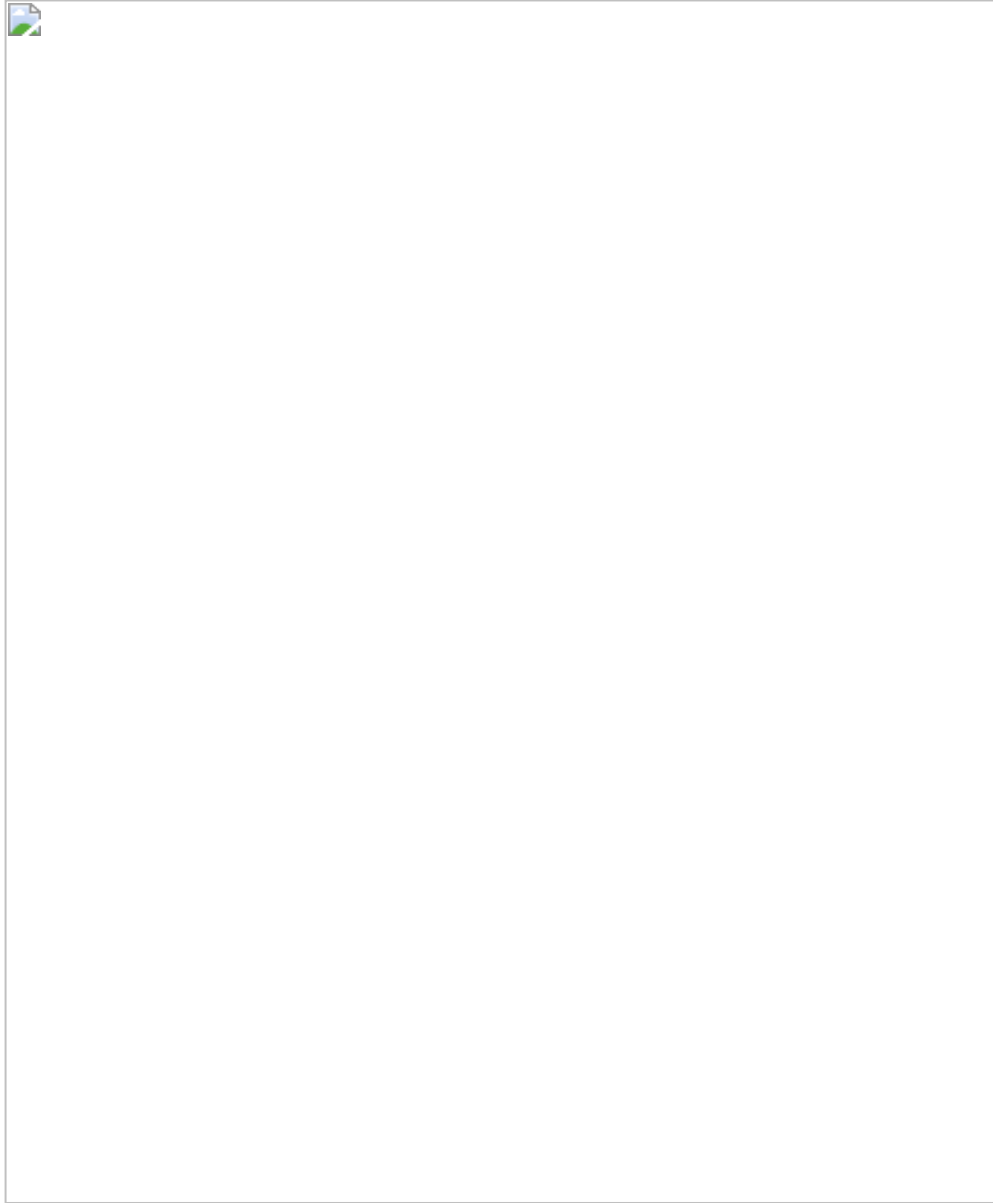


126. *Interior of a Restaurant*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas,  
45.5 x 56.5 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





127. *Agostina Segatori in the Café du Tambourin*,  
Paris, February-March 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 55.5 x 46.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



128. *Portrait of a Restaurant Owner,*  
*possibly Lucien Martin,*  
Paris, winter 1886-1887.  
Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 54.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Mr. Levens**  
**Paris, Aug-Oct. 1886**

[Letter written in English by Vincent van Gogh to the English painter Horace M. Livens, whom he had met in Antwerp. The text is reproduced without alterations.]

Paris, Aug-Oct. 1887

My dear Mr. Levens,

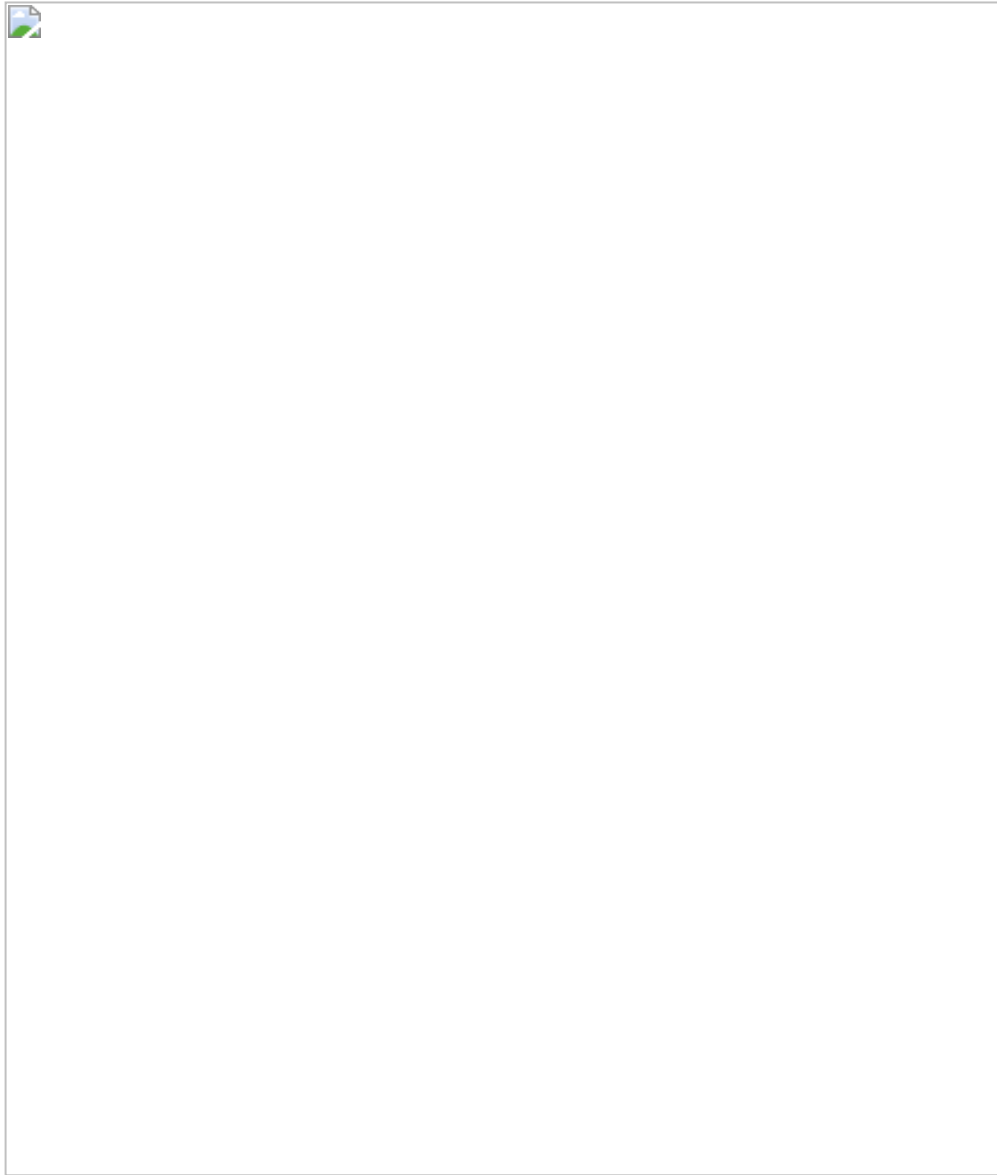
Since I am here in Paris I have very often thought of yourself and work. You will remember that I liked your colour, your ideas on art and literature and I add, most of all your personality. I have already before now thought that I ought to let you know what I was doing, where I was. But what refrained me was that I find living in Paris is much dearer than in Antwerp and not knowing what your circumstances are I dare not say, come over to Paris from Antwerp without warning you that it costs one dearer, and that if poor, one has to suffer many things - as you may imagine. But on the other hand there is more chance of selling. There is also a good chance of exchanging pictures with other artists. In one word, with much energy, with a sincere personal feeling of colour in nature I would say an artist can get on here notwithstanding the many obstructions. And I intend remaining here still longer. There is much to be seen here - for instance Delacroix, to name only one master. In Antwerp I did not even know what the impressionists were, now I have seen them and though not being one of the club yet I have much admired certain impressionists' pictures - Degas nude figure - Claude Monet landscape.

And now for what regards what I myself have been doing, I have lacked money for paying models else I had entirely given myself to figure painting. But I have made a series of colour studies in painting, simply flowers, red poppies, blue corn flowers and myosotys, white and rose roses, yellow chrysanthemums-seeking oppositions of blue with orange, red and green, yellow and violet seeking les tons rompus et neutres to harmonise brutal extremes. Trying to render intense colour and not a grey harmony. Now alter these gymnastics I lately did two heads which I dare say are better in light and colour than those I did before.

So as we said at the time: in colour seeking life the true drawing is modelling with colour.

I did a dozen landscapes too, frankly green frankly blue.





129. *Self-Portrait with a Straw Hat*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas,  
41 x 33 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



130. *Self-Portrait in Straw Hat*,  
Paris, spring or summer 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 34.9 x 26.7 cm.  
The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

And so I am struggling for life and progress in art.

Now I would very much like to know what you are doing and whether you ever think of going to Paris.

If ever you did come here, write to me before and I will, if you like, share my lodgings and studio with you so long as I have any. In spring - say February or even sooner I may be going to the South of France, the land of the blue tones and gay colours.

And look here, if I knew you had longings for the same we might combine.

I felt sure at the time that you are a thorough colourist and since I saw the impressionists I assure you that neither your colour nor mine as it is developing itself, is exactly the same as their theories. But so much dare I say we have a chance and a good one finding friends. I hope your health is all-right. I was rather low down in health when in Antwerp but got better here.

Write to me in any case. Remember me to Allen, Briet, Rink, Durant but I have not often thought of them as I did think of you - almost daily.

Shaking hands cordially. Yours truly Vincent

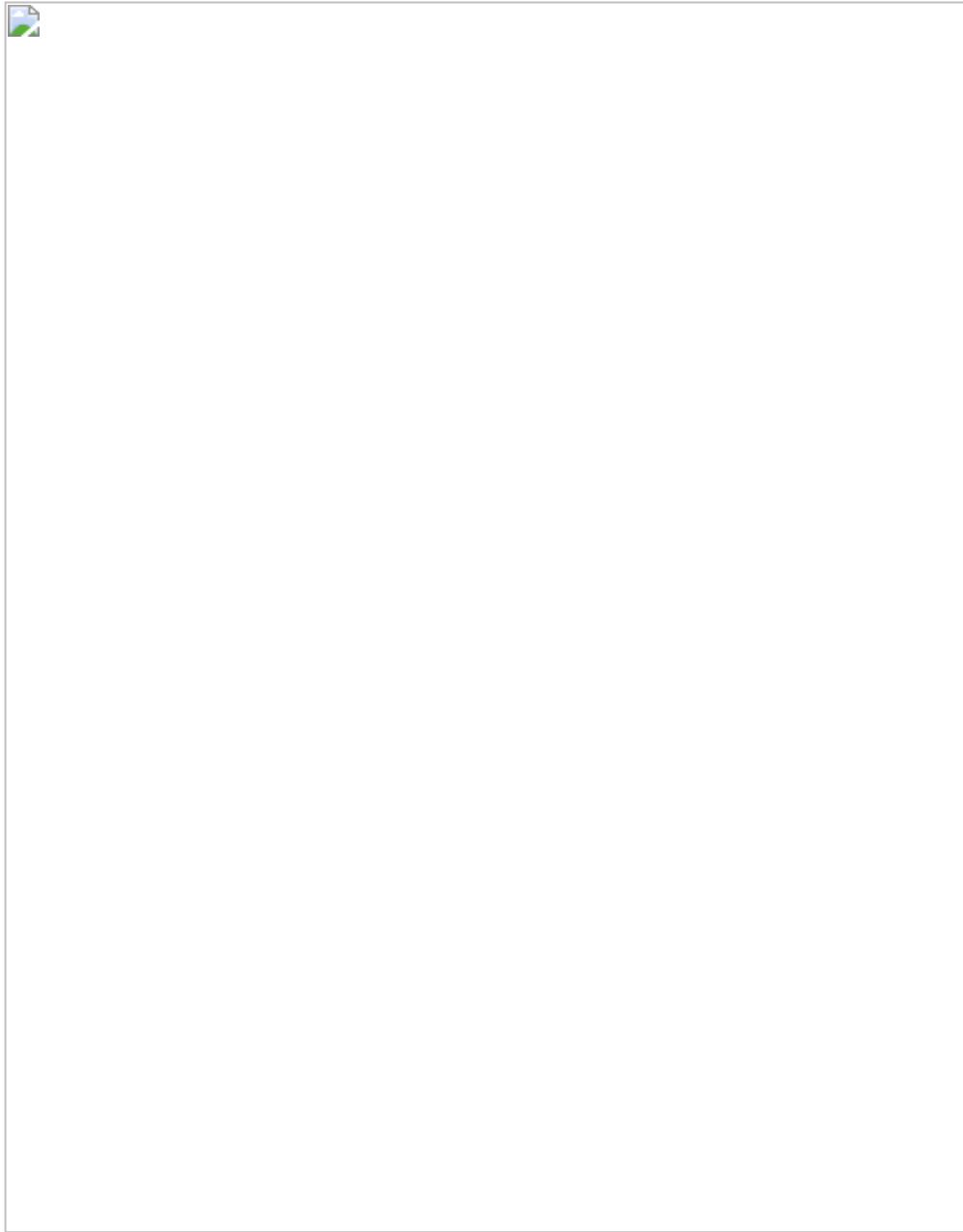
My present address is

Mr. Vincent van Gogh

54 Rue Lepic, Paris.

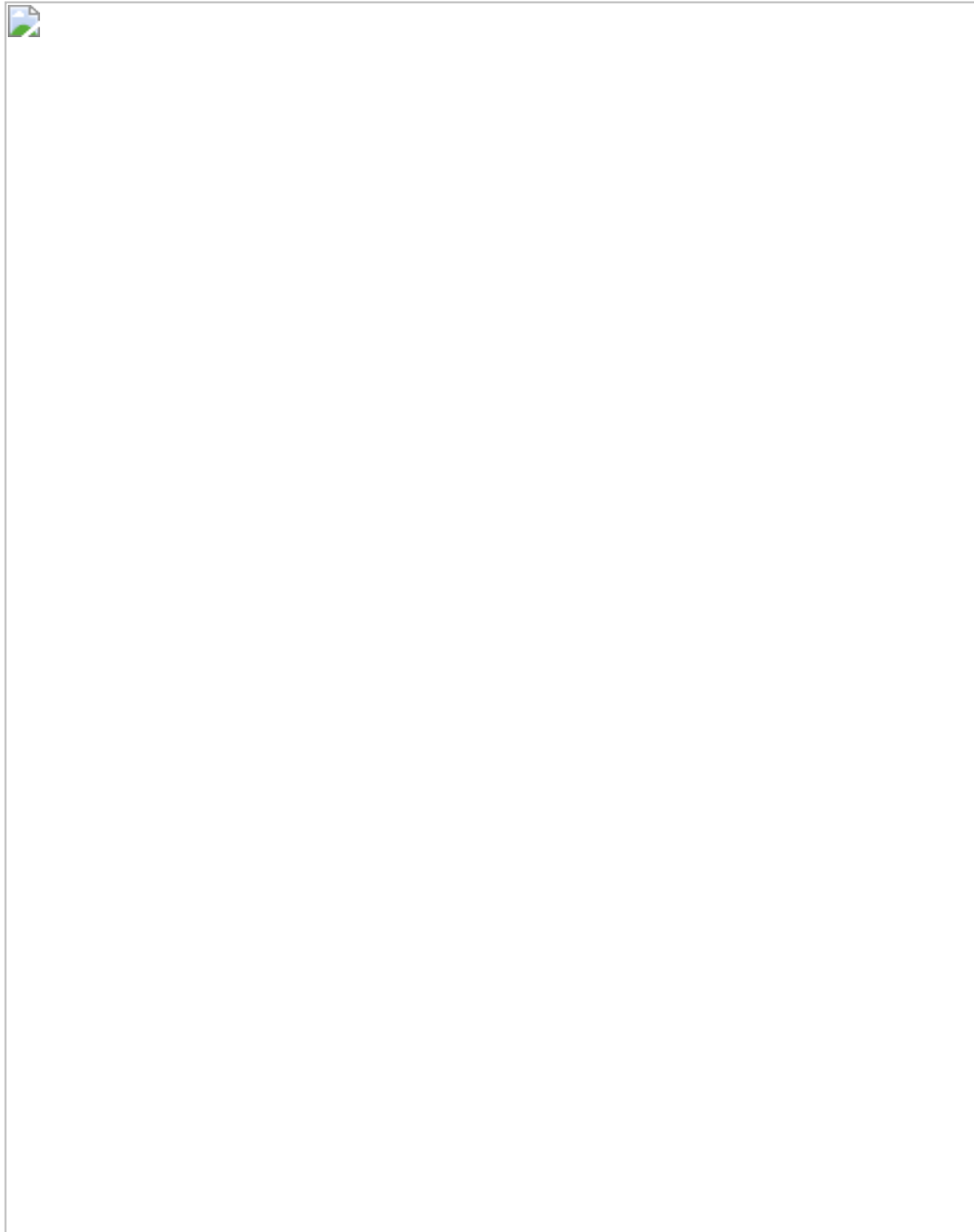
With regard my chances of sale look here, they are certainly not much but still I do have a beginning.

At the present moment I have found four dealers who have exhibited studies of mine. And I have exchanged studies with many artists.



131. *Self-Portrait as an Artist*,  
Paris, January-February 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 50.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

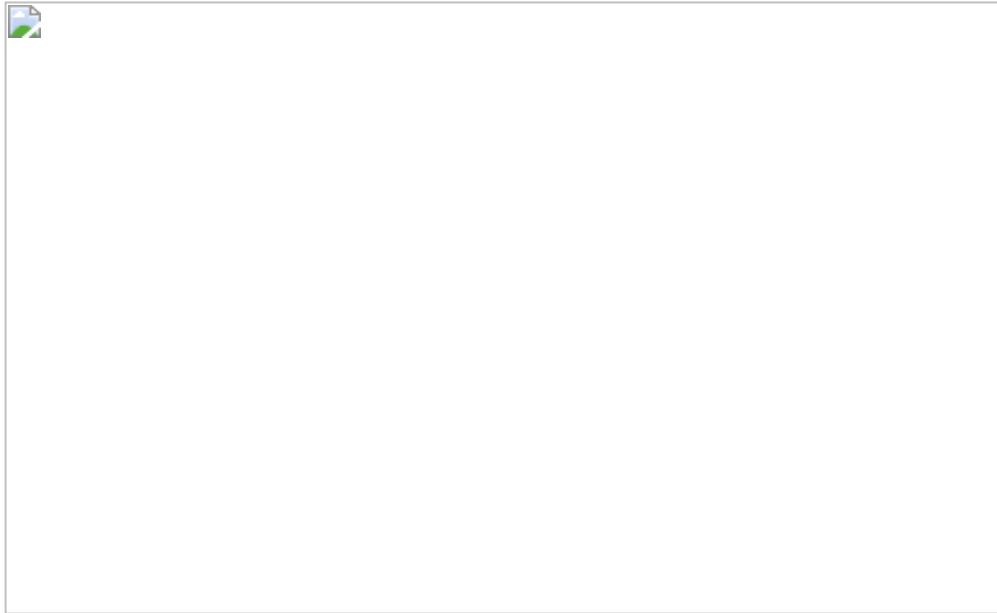




132. *Self-Portrait*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on artist's board  
mounted on cradled panel,  
41 x 32.5 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.



133. *Portrait of Alexander Reid*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on canvas,  
42 x 33 cm. Glasgow Art Gallery  
and Museum, Glasgow.



134. *Nude Woman Reclining, Seen from the Back*,  
Paris, first half of 1887. Oil on canvas,  
38 x 61 cm. Private Collection.

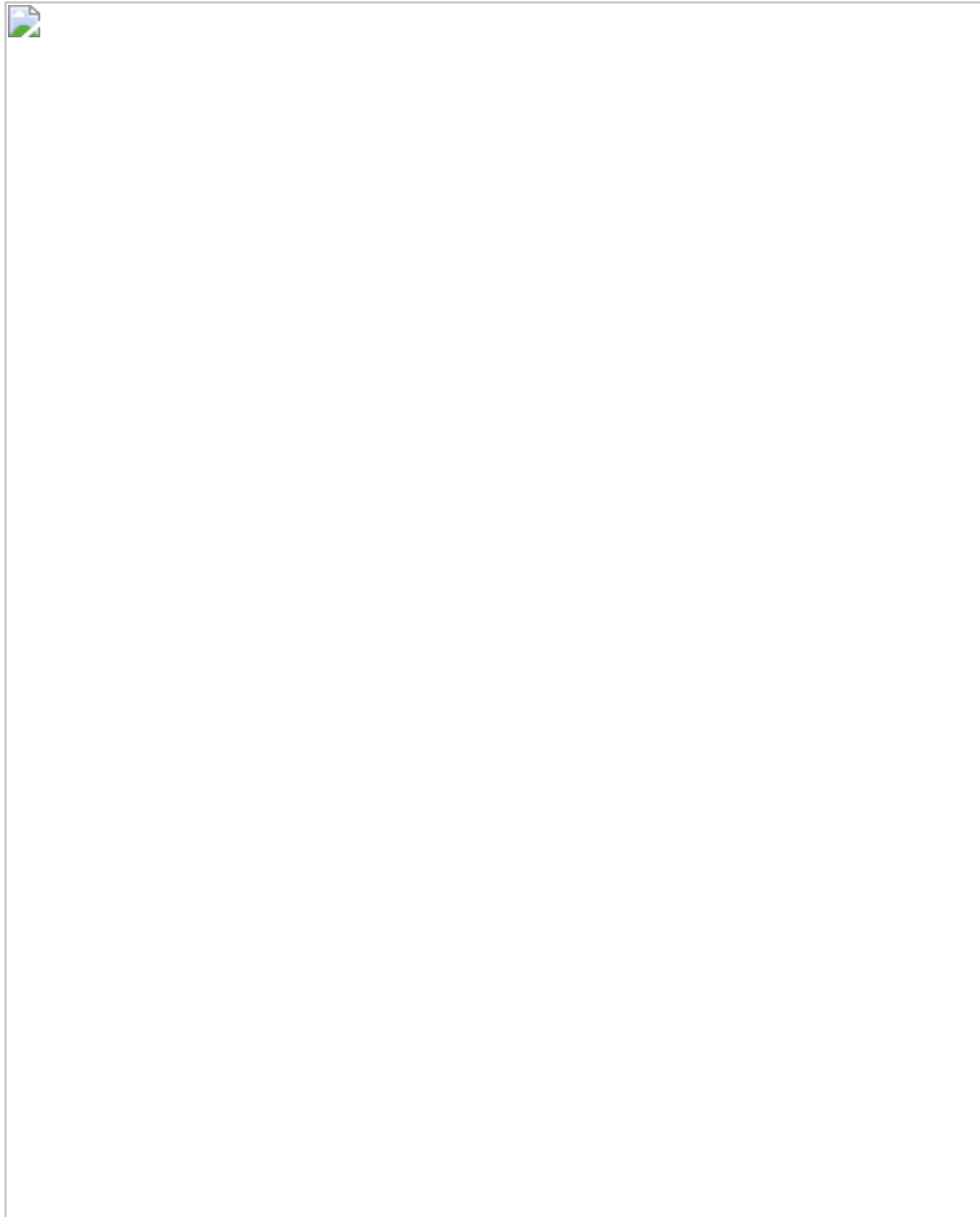
Now the prices are 50 francs. Certainly not much - but - as far as I can see one must sell cheap to rise and even at costing price. And mind my dear fellow, Paris is Paris. There is but one Paris and however hard living may be here, and if it became worse and harder even - the french air clears up the brain and does good - a world of good. I have been in Cormons studio for three or four months but I did not find that so useful as I had expected it to be. It may be my fault however, anyhow I left there too as I left Antwerp and since I worked alone, and fancy that since I feel my own self more.

Trade is slow here. The great dealers sell Millet, Delacroix, Corot, Daubigny, Dupré, a few other masters at exorbitant prices. They do little or nothing for young artists. The second class dealers on the contrary sell those at very low prices. If I asked more I would do nothing, I fancy. However I have faith in colour. Even with regards the price the public will pay for it in the long run. But for the present things are awfully hard. Therefore let anyone who risks to go over here consider there is no laying on roses at all.

What is to be gained is progress and what the deuce that is, it is to be found here. I dare say as certain anyone who has a solid position elsewhere let him stay where he is. But for adventurers as myself, I think they lose nothing in risking more. Especially as in my case I am not an adventurer by choice but by fate, and feeling nowhere so much myself a stranger as in my family and country. - Kindly remember me to your landlady Mrs Roosmalen and say her that if she will exhibit something of my work I will send her a small picture of mine.

[According to John Rewald of New York, this letter was first published in the Sunday Times, London, February 17, 1929 (ed. F.V. Lucas). Livens painted mainly "farmyards." The letter was written in 1886 (not 1887).]





135. *Torso of a Woman (Plaster Statue)*,  
Paris, spring 1886. Oil on canvas, 41 x 32.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



136. *Still Life with a Plaster Statuette*,  
Paris, late 1887. Oil on canvas.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

## **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh Paris, Summer 1887**

My dear friend,

Enclosed is a letter which arrived yesterday, but which the concierge didn't give me straight away. I've been to the Tambourin, since if I hadn't gone, they would have thought I was afraid. And I told la Segatori that I wouldn't pass judgement on her in this matter, but that it was for her to judge herself. That I had torn up the receipt for the pictures - but that she had to return everything. That if she had not had a hand in what had happened to me, she would have seen me the next day. That as she didn't come to see me, my feeling was that she knew they were trying to pick a quarrel with me, but that she had tried to warn me by saying, "Go away," which I hadn't understood, and furthermore, perhaps didn't want to understand.

To which she replied that the pictures, & all the rest, were at my disposal. She maintained that it was I who had tried to pick a quarrel - which doesn't surprise me - knowing that if she sided with me they would take it out on her. I also saw the waiter when I went in, but he made himself scarce. I didn't want to take the pictures immediately, but I said that when you returned we would discuss the matter because these pictures belong to you as much as to me, and in the meantime I advised her to think about what had happened again. She didn't look well and was white as a sheet, which isn't a good sign. She didn't know that the waiter had gone up to your place. If that's true, I would be more inclined to believe she had tried to warn me they were trying to pick a quarrel with me than that she had plotted the whole thing herself. She cannot do as she likes. I'm awaiting your return now before taking any action. I've done two pictures since you left. Have only got two louis left and I'm afraid I don't know how I'm going to manage from now until your return.

Don't forget that when I started working at Asnières I had plenty of canvases and Tanguy was very good to me. In fact he still is, but his old witch of a wife realized what was going on and complained. So I gave Tanguy's wife a piece of my mind and told her that it was her fault if I didn't buy anything more from them. Old man Tanguy is sensible enough to keep quiet, and will do whatever I want anyway. But with all this, work isn't easy.

I saw Lautrec today; he's sold a picture, through Portier I think. A watercolour of Mme. Mesdag's has arrived which I find very beautiful.[\[75\]](#)

Now I hope you'll enjoy your trip over there; remember me to my mother, to Cor & to Wil. And if you could manage, by sending me something again, to ensure that I don't have too hard a time from now until you get back, then I shall try to do some more pictures for you - as I'm really very happy as far as my work goes. What worried me a little about this business was that it looked a little cowardly not going there, to the Tambourin. And my peace of mind has been restored by my going there.

I shake your hand,

Vincent





137. *Still Life with Three Books*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on an oval canvas,  
31 x 48.5 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



138. *Still Life with Books (Parisian Novels)*,  
Paris, autumn 1887. Oil on canvas, 73 x 93 cm.  
Holmes à Court Gallery, East Perth.



139. *Still Life with a Carafe and Lemons*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on canvas,  
46.5 x 38.5 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



*140. Still Life with Pears,*  
Paris, winter 1887-1888.  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 59.5 cm.  
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden,  
Gemäldegalerie Neue Meister, Dresden.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Wilhelmina van Gogh  
Paris, Summer/fall 1887**

My dear little sister,

I thank you very much for your letter, but for my part I hate writing these days. Still, there are some questions in your letter which I should like to answer.

To begin with, I must disagree with you when you say you thought Theo looked “so wretched” this summer. Personally, I think that on the contrary Theo’s appearance has become a great deal more distinguished during the past year. One has to be strong to stand life in Paris for as many years as he has done.

But might it have been that Theo’s family and friends in Amsterdam and The Hague didn’t treat him, or even receive him, with the cordiality he deserved from them and was entitled to expect? On that score, I can tell you that he may have felt hurt but is otherwise not at all bothered; after all, he is doing business even in these particularly bad times for the picture trade, so may it not be that his Dutch friends were somewhat affected by *jalousie de métier*? [Professional jealousy]

Now, what shall I say about your little piece on the plants and the rain? You can see yourself that in nature many flowers are trampled underfoot, frozen or scorched, and for that matter not every grain of corn returns to the soil after ripening to germinate and grow into a blade of corn - indeed, that by far the greatest number of grains of corn do not develop fully but end up at the mill - isn’t this so? To compare human beings with grains of corn, now - in every human being who is healthy and natural there is a germinating force, just as there is in a grain of corn. And so natural life is germination. What the germinating force is to the grain, love is to us.

Now we tend to stand about pulling a long face and at a loss for words, I think, when, thwarted in our natural development, we find that germination has been foiled and we ourselves placed in circumstances as hopeless as they must be for a grain between the millstones.

When that happens to us and we are utterly bewildered by the loss of our natural life, there are some amongst us who, though ready to submit to the inevitable, are yet unwilling to relinquish their self-confidence, and

determine to discover what is the matter with them and what is really happening.



141. *Two Cut Sunflowers*,  
Paris, August-September 1887.  
Oil on canvas on triplex,  
21 x 27 cm. Kunstmuseum, Bern.



142. *Sunflowers*,  
Paris, August-September 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 43.2 x 61 cm.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



And if, full of good intentions, we search in the books of which it is said that they illuminate the darkness, with the best will in the world we find precious little that is certain, and not always the satisfaction of personal consolation.

And the diseases from which we civilized people suffer most are melancholy and pessimism. So I, for instance, who can count so many years of my life during which I lost any inclination to laugh - leaving aside whether or not this was my own fault - I, for one, feel the need for a really good laugh above all else. I've found it in Guy de Maupassant, and there are others - Rabelais among the older writers, Henri Rochefort among the present-day ones - who provide it as well - and Voltaire in *Candide*.

If, on the other hand, one wants the truth, life as it is, then there are, for instance, de Goncourt in *Germinie Lacerteux*, *La Fille Eliza*, Zola in *La Joie de Vivre* and *L'Assommoire*, and so many other masterpieces, all portraying life as we feel it themselves, thus satisfying our need for being told the truth.

The work of the French naturalists, Zola, Flaubert, Guy de Maupassant, de Goncourt, Richepin, Daudet, Huysmans, is magnificent, and one can scarcely be said to belong to one's time if one is not acquainted with them. Maupassant's masterpiece is *Bel Ami*. I hope to be able to get it for you.

Is the Bible enough for us? These days I think Jesus himself would say again to those who sit down in melancholy, "It is not here, it is risen. Why seek ye the living among the dead?" If the spoken or written word is to remain the light of the world, then we have the right and duty to acknowledge that we live in an age when it should be spoken and written in such a way that, if it is to be just as great and just as good and just as original and just as potent as ever to transform the whole of society, then its effect must be comparable to that of the revolution wrought by the old Kristians.

[76]

I, for my part, am always glad that I have read the Bible more carefully than many people do nowadays, just because it gives me some peace of mind to know that there used to be such lofty ideals.

But precisely because I find the old beautiful, I find the new beautiful à plus forte raison because we are able to take action in our own time while the past and the future concern us only indirectly.

My own adventures are confined chiefly to making swift progress toward growing into a little old man - you know, with wrinkles, a tough beard and a

number of false teeth, and so on. But what does all that matter? I have a dirty and difficult trade - painting, and if I were not as I am, I should not paint; but being as I am, I often work with pleasure and can visualize the vague possibility of one day doing paintings with some youth and freshness in them, even though my own youth is one of the things I have lost.

If I didn't have Theo, I should not be able to do justice to my work, but having him for a friend, I'm sure I shall make progress and things will fall into place. As soon as possible I plan to spend some time in the south, where there is even more colour and even more sun.

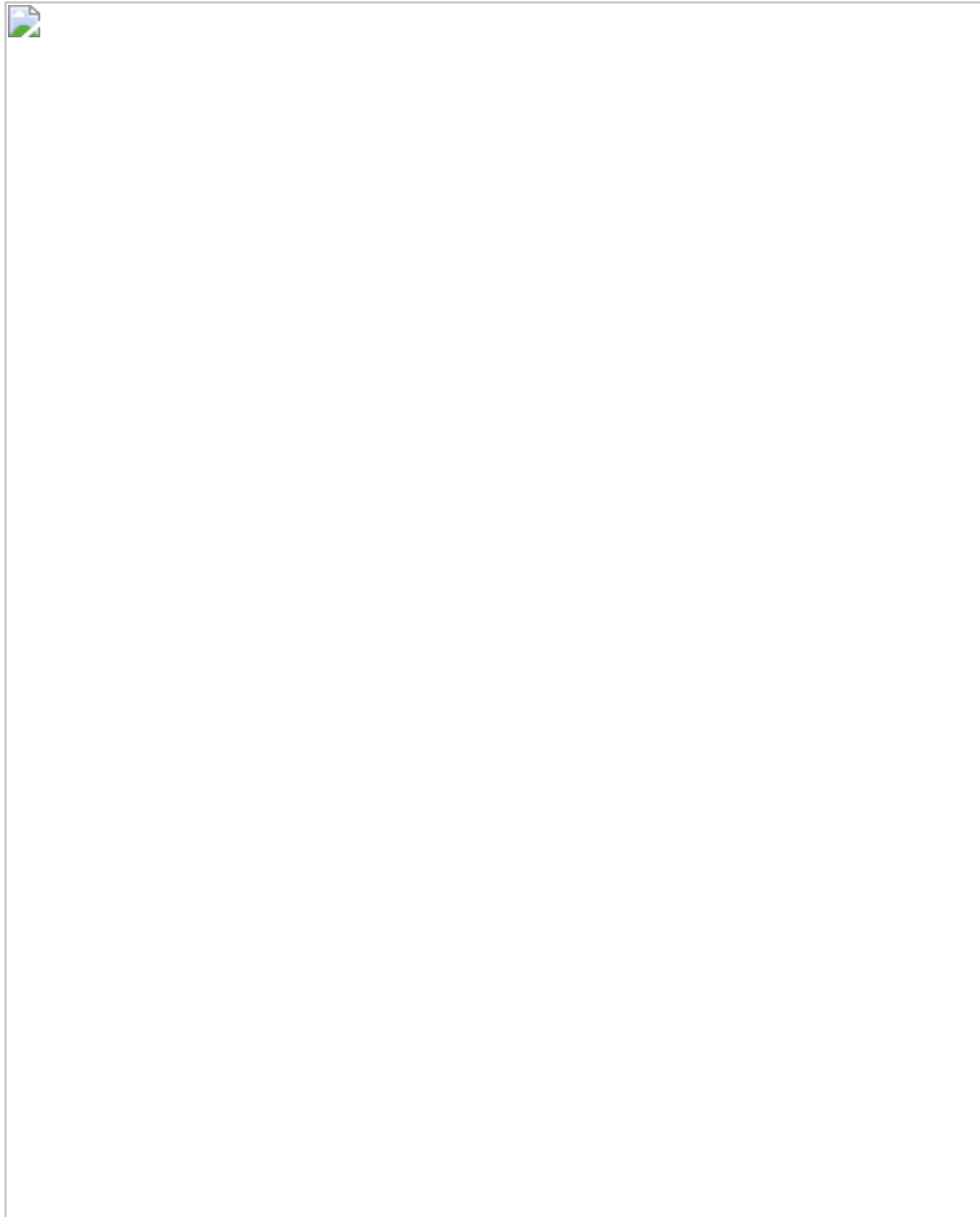


143. *Still Life with Red Cabbages and Onions*,  
Paris, autumn 1887. Oil on canvas,  
50 x 64.5 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

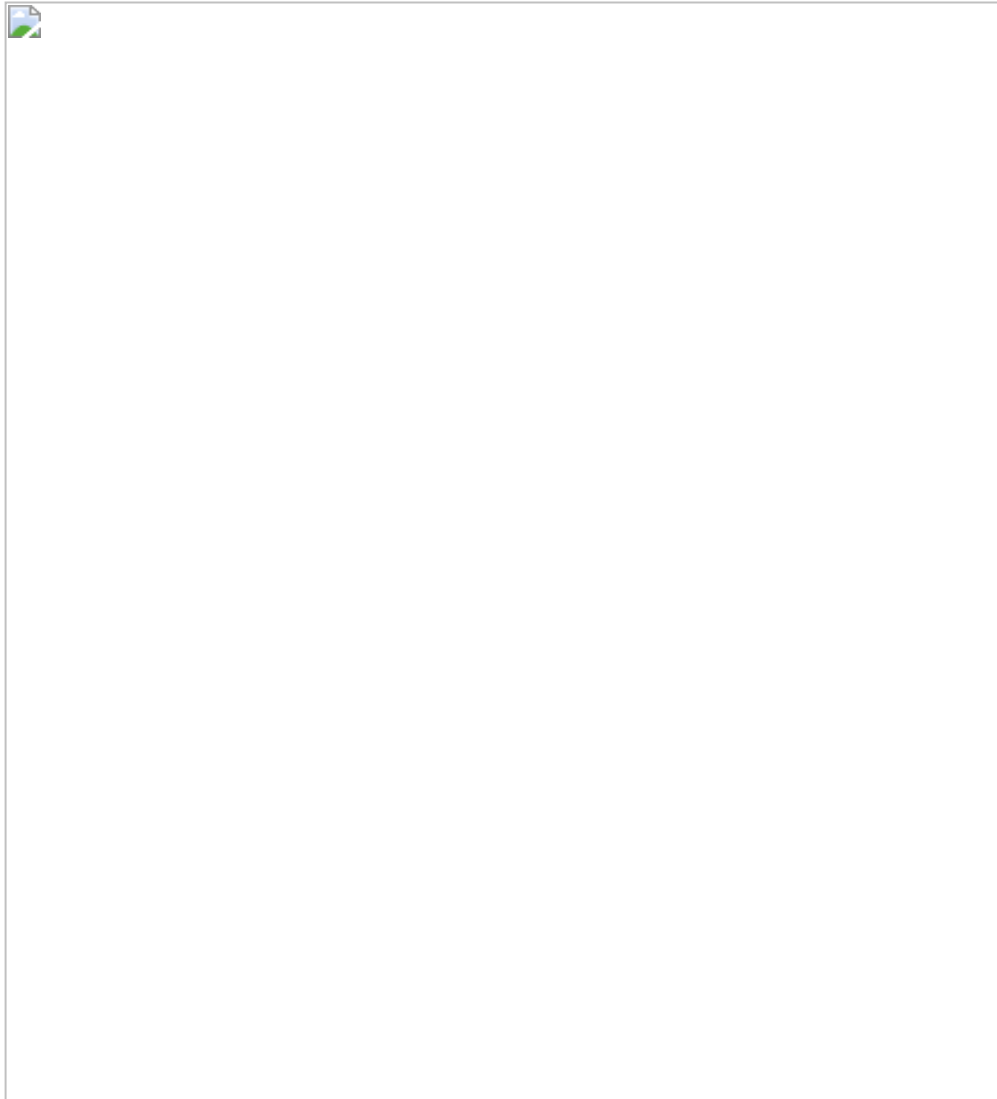


144. *Bouquet of Flowers*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas,  
61 x 38 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





145. *Vase with Lilacs, Daisies and Anemones*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas,  
46.5 x 37.5 cm.  
Private Collection, Geneva.



146. *Still Life*,  
Paris, spring 1887. Oil on canvas,  
41 x 38 cm. Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal.

But what I really hope to do is to paint a good portrait. So there.

To get back to your little piece of literature, I have qualms about adopting for my own use, or about advising others to do so for theirs, the belief that there are powers above us that interfere personally in order to help or console us. Providence is such a strange thing, and I must confess that I haven't the slightest idea what to make of it. And well, there is still a degree of sentimentality in your little piece, and its form is reminiscent above all of tales about the above-mentioned providence, or let's say the providence in question. Tales that so often don't hold water, and to which a great many objections might be made.

And above all I find it alarming that you believe you must study in order to write. No, my dear little sister, learn how to dance, or fall in love with one or more of the notary's clerks, officers, in short, any who are within your reach - rather, much rather commit any number of follies than study in Holland. It serves absolutely no other purpose than to make people slow-witted, and I won't hear of it.

For my part, I still continue to have the most impossible and highly unsuitable love affairs, from which as a rule I come away with little more than shame and disgrace. And in my own opinion I am absolutely right to do this, since, as I keep telling myself, in years gone by, when I ought to have been in love, I gave myself up to religious and socialist affairs, and considered art holier than I do now.

Why are religion, or justice, or art so sacred? People who do nothing but fall in love are perhaps more serious and saintly than those who sacrifice their love and their hearts to an idea. Be that as it may, in order to write a book, do a deed, paint a picture with some life in it, one has to be alive oneself. And so, unless you never want to progress, study is a matter of very secondary importance for you. Enjoy yourself as much as you can, have as many diversions as you can, and remember that what people demand in art nowadays is something very much alive, with strong colour and great intensity. So intensify your own health and strength and life a little; that is the best study.

I should be most obliged if you could let me know how Margot Begemann is and how things are with the De Groots, how did that business turn out? Did Sien de Groot marry her cousin? And did her child live?

Of my own work I think that the picture of peasants eating potatoes I did in Nuenen is après tout the best I've done. But since then I've had no chance of getting models, though on the other hand I did have the chance to study the colour question. And if I should find models again for my figures later, then I would hope to be able to show that I am after something other than little green landscapes or flowers.

Last year I painted almost nothing but flowers so as to get used to colours other than grey, vis. pink, soft or bright green, light blue, violet, yellow, orange, glorious red.



147. *Patch of Grass*,  
Paris, April-June 1887. Oil on canvas,  
31.5 x 40.5 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





148. *Underbrush*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas,  
33 x 47 cm. Centraal Museum, Utrecht.

And when I was painting landscapes at Asnières this summer, I saw more colour in them than I did before. Now I'm going to try it with a portrait. And I must say that I'm not painting any the worse for it, perhaps because I could tell you of a very great deal that's wrong with both painters and paintings if I wanted to, quite as easily as I could tell you something that's good about them.

I don't want to be included among the melancholy or those who turn sour and bitter or ill-tempered. "Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner" [to understand everything is to forgive everything], and I believe that if we knew everything we should attain some serenity. Now, having as much of that serenity as possible, even when one knows little or nothing for certain, is perhaps a better remedy for all ills than what is sold in the pharmacy. Much of it comes by itself, one grows and develops of one's own accord.

So don't study and grind away too much, for that makes one sterile. Enjoy yourself too much rather than too little, and don't take art and love too seriously - there is very little one can do about it, it is mainly a question of temperament.

If I were living near you, I should try to make you understand that it might perhaps be more practical for you to paint with me than to write, and that you might be able to express your feelings more easily that way. In any case I can do something personally about your painting, but I am not in the writing profession.

Anyway, it's not a bad idea for you to become an artist, for when one has fire within oneself and a soul, one cannot keep bottling them up - better to burn than to burst, what is in will come out. For me, for instance, it is a relief to do a painting, and without that I should be more miserable than I am.

Give Mother much love from me,

Vincent

I was deeply moved by *A la recherche du bonheur*. I have just finished *Mont-Oriol* by Guy de Maupassant.

Art often seems very exalted and, as you say, sacred. But the same can be said of love. And the only problem is that not everybody thinks about it in this way, and that those who do feel something of it, and let themselves be carried away by it, have to suffer so much, firstly because they are misunderstood, but quite as often because their inspiration is so often inadequate, or their work is frustrated by circumstances. One ought to be

able to do two or even more things at once. And there are certainly times when it is far from clear to us that art should be something sacred or good.

Anyway, do weigh up carefully if those with a feeling for art, and trying to work at it, wouldn't do better to declare that they are doing it because they were born with that feeling, cannot help themselves and are following their nature, than make out they are doing it for some noble purpose. Doesn't it say in *A la recherche du bonheur* that evil lies in our own nature - which we have not created ourselves? I think it so admirable of the moderns that they do not moralize like the old ones. Thus many people are appalled and scandalized by "Le vice et la vertu sont des produits chimiques, comme le sucre et le vitriol." [Vice and virtue are chemical products, like sugar and vitriol.]

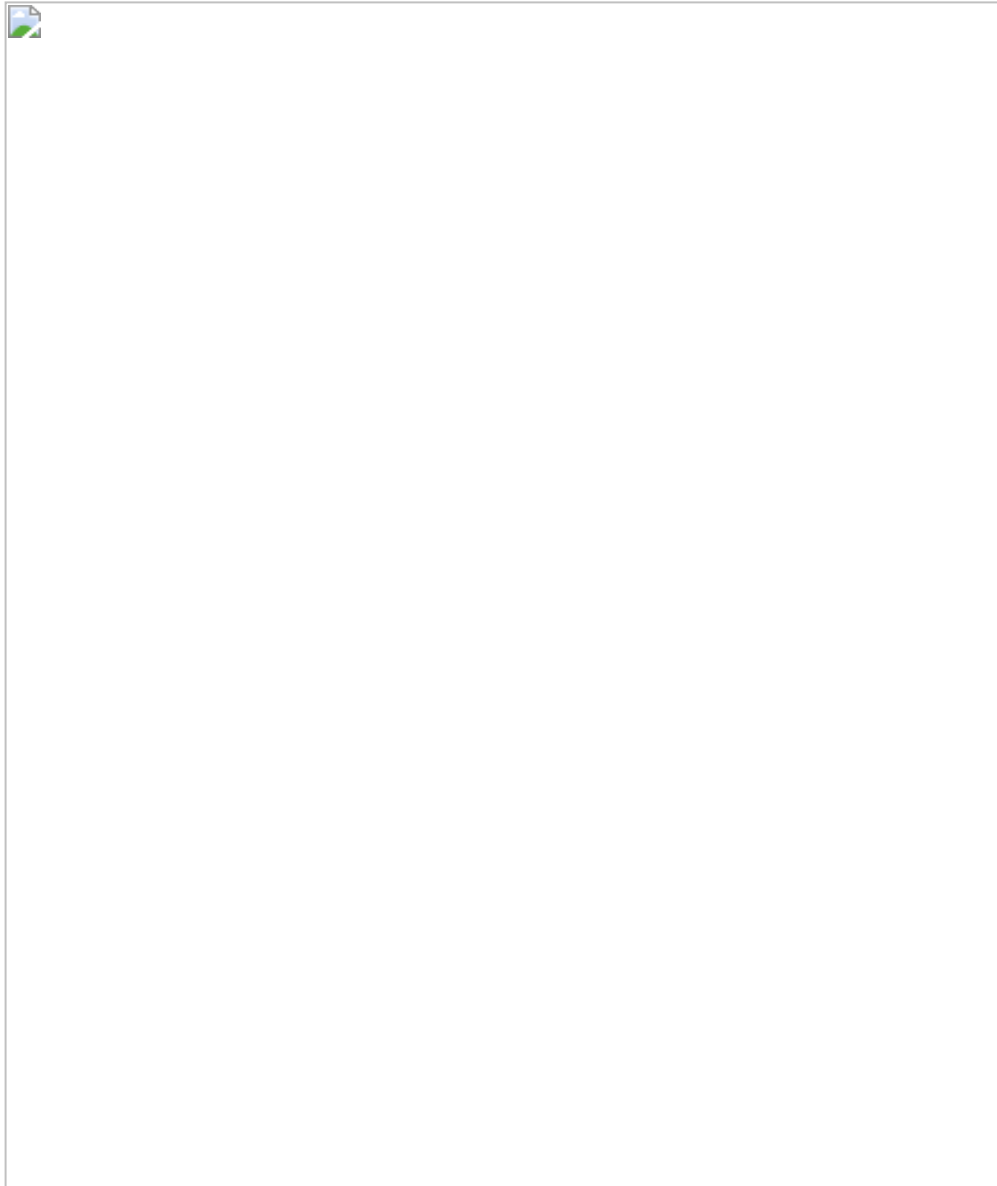


149. *Factories at Asnières*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas, 53.7 x 72.7 cm.  
Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis.



150. *Wheat Field with a Skylark*,  
Paris, summer 1887. Oil on canvas, 34 x 65.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





151. *Japonaiserie: Flowering Plum Tree (after Hiroshige)*,  
Paris, September-October 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 55 x 46 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard**  
**Paris, Fall 1887**

My dear Bernard,

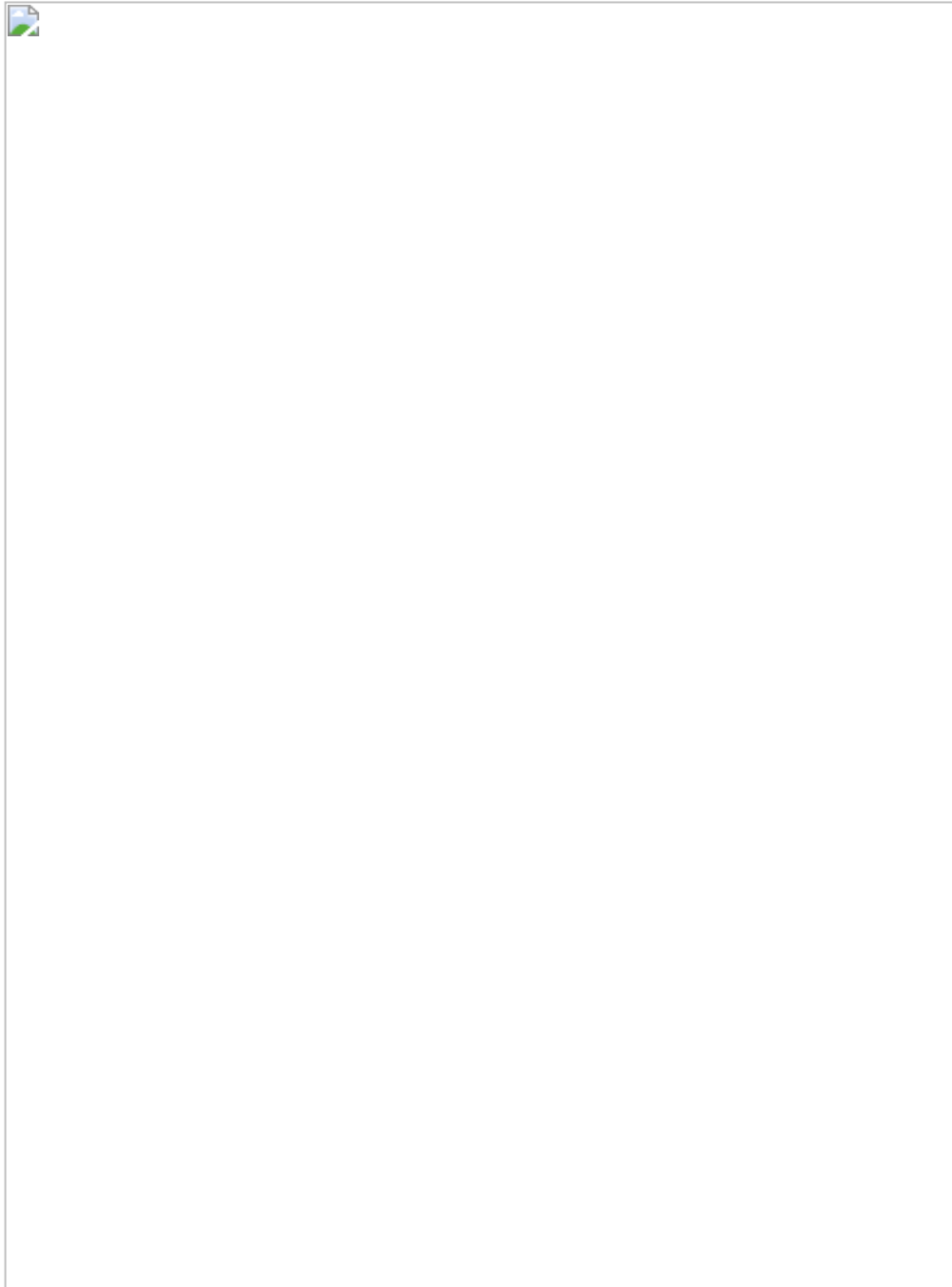
I feel impelled to apologize to you for having left you so abruptly the other day. So I do so herewith without delay. I recommend to you to read Tolstoi's Russian Legends, and I shall also let you have the article on Eug. Delacroix I spoke of.

All the same, I myself went to see Guillaumin, but in the evening, and I thought that perhaps you did not know his address, which is 13 Quai d'Anjou. I believe that Guillaumin as a human being has sounder ideas than the others, and if all were like him they would produce more good things, and would have less time and inclination to fight each other so furiously.

I persist in believing, not because I have given you a piece of my mind, but because it will become your own conviction too - I persist in believing that you will discover that in the studios one not only does not learn much about painting, but not even much good about the art of living; and that one finds oneself forced to learn how to live in the same way one must learn to paint, without having recourse to the old tricks and eye-deceiving devices of intriguers.

I do not think your self-portrait will be either your last or your best, although on the whole it is terribly you.

Listen now, what I tried to explain to you the other day amounts roughly to this. In order to avoid generalizations, allow me to take an example borrowed from reality. If you have quarreled with a painter, and consequently say, "If Signac exhibits in the place where I exhibit, I shall withdraw my pictures," and if you slander him, then it seems to me that you are not acting as well as you might. For it is better to look at things for a long time before judging so categorically, and to think things over; for in case of a quarrel, reflection shows us as many wrongs on our own part as on the other's - and that the latter has as much *raison d'être* as we would claim for our own.



152. *The Bridge in the Rain (after Hiroshige)*,  
Paris, September-October 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 54 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



153. *The Courtesan (after Eisen)*,  
Paris, September-October 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 105.5 x 60.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

So if you have already thought that Signac and others who use pointillism quite often do very fine things for all that, instead of slandering them you must respect them and speak sympathetically of them, especially if there has been a quarrel. Otherwise one becomes a sectarian, narrow-minded self, and the equal of those who utterly despise all others and believe themselves to be the only just ones.

This even extends as far as the academicians; take, for example, a picture by Fantin-Latour, especially his work as a whole. Well, here is one who never revolted, but does this prevent him from having that something, whatever it may be, of calm and fairness that makes him one of the most independent characters alive?

Furthermore I wanted to say a few words about the military service which you will have to perform. From now on you must absolutely attend to that - directly in order to find out in the first place what steps can be taken in such a case to safeguard your right to work, to be able to choose your garrison, etc., but indirectly in order to take care of your health. You must not go there in too anemic or enervated a condition, if you set a value on coming out of it stronger.

I do not consider it a great misfortune for you to be obliged to be a soldier, but rather as a very serious trial from which you will emerge - if you emerge at all - a very great artist.

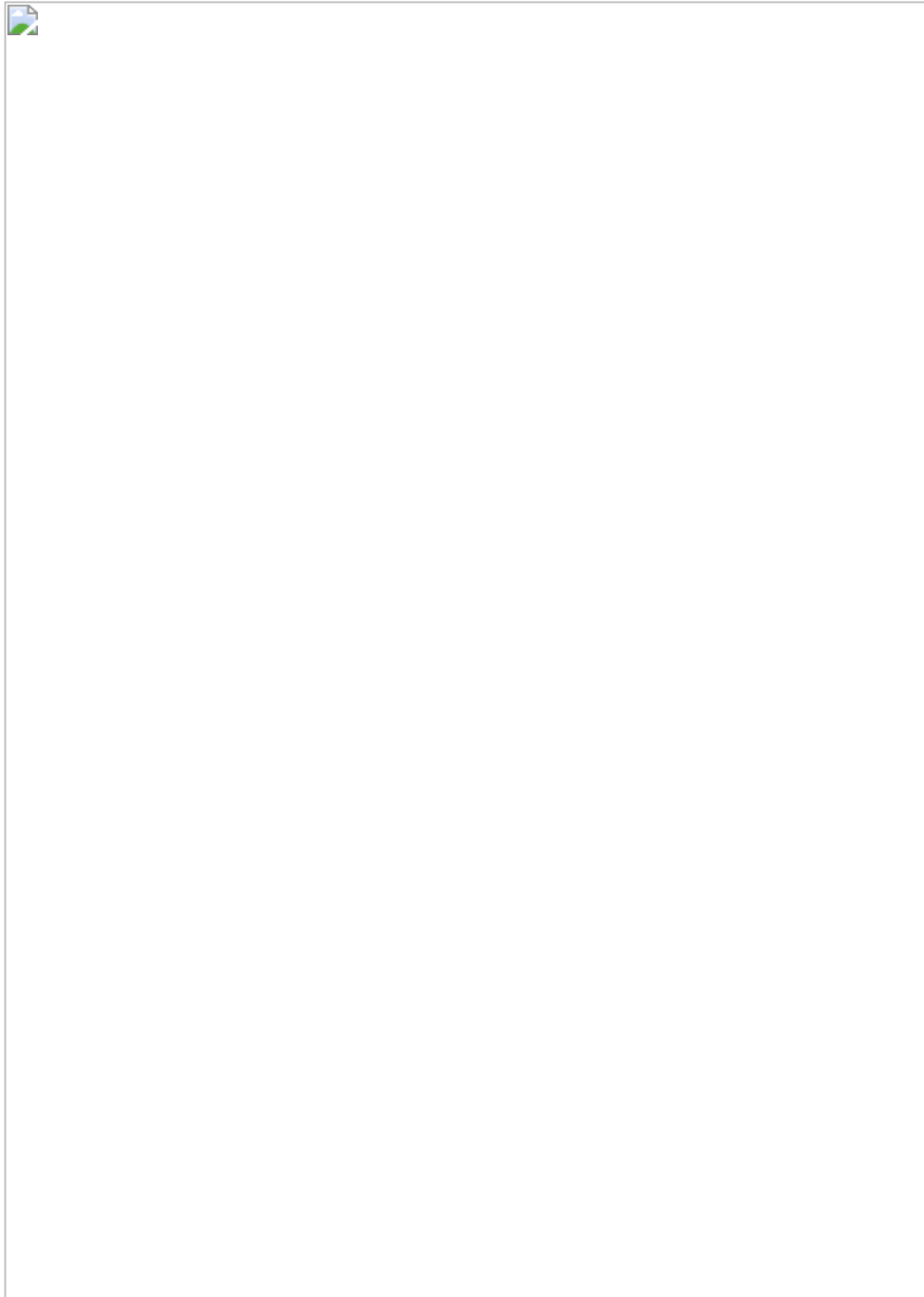
Until then do your utmost to fortify yourself, for you will need plenty of vigour. If you work a lot during that year, I think you might end up by having a certain stock of pictures, some of which we shall try to sell for you, as we know you will need ready money to pay for models.

I shall be glad to do all I can to make a success of what we began in the cafe, but I think that the primary condition on which success depends is to set aside all petty jealousies, for only union is strength. Surely the common interest is worth the sacrifice of that selfishness of every man for himself.

With a hearty handshake,

Vincent





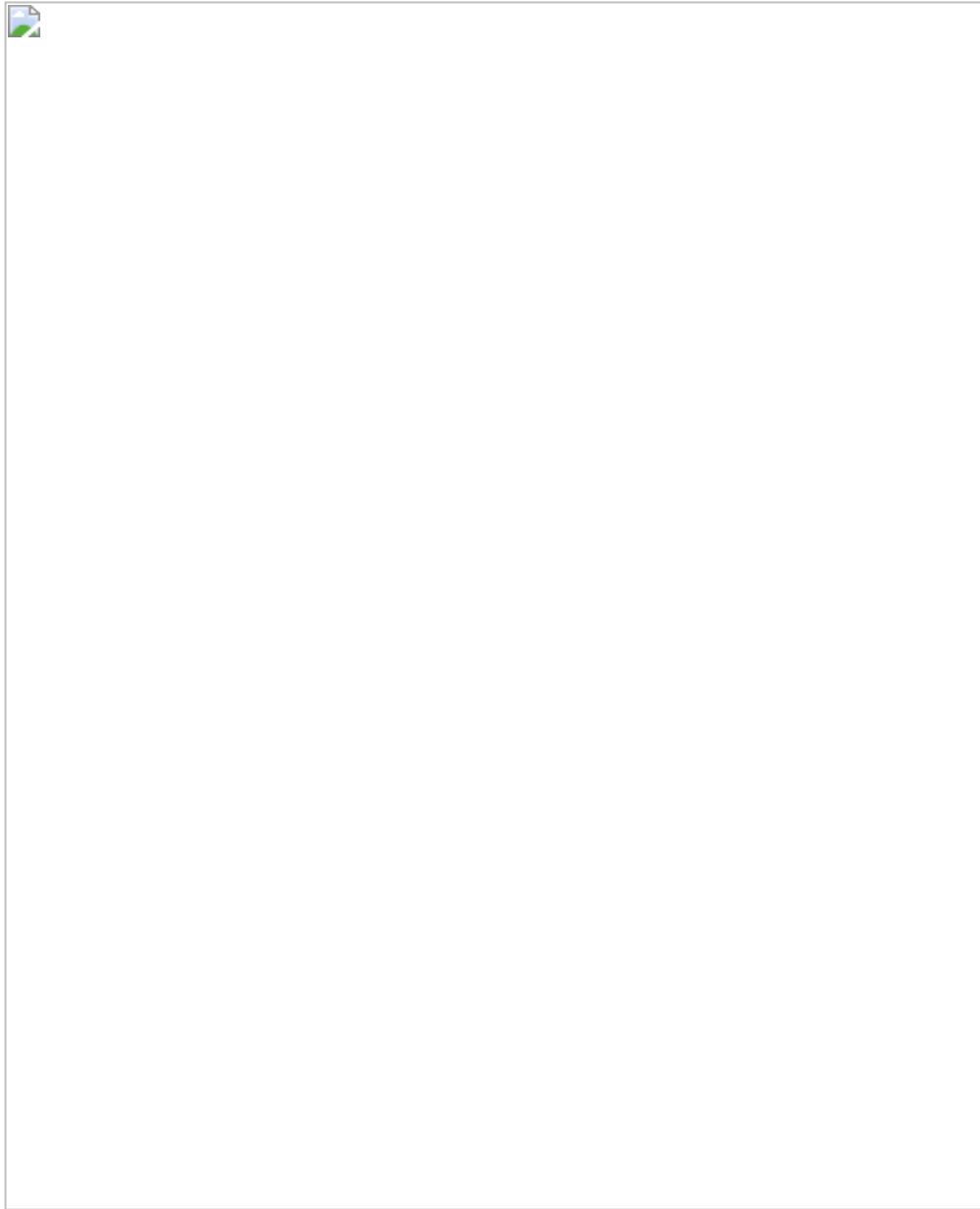
154. *Italian Woman (Agostina Segatori?)*,  
Paris, December 1887. Oil on canvas,  
81 x 60 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



155. *Portrait of Père Tanguy*,  
Paris, winter 1887-1888.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 51 cm.  
Collection of Stavros S. Niarchos, London.



156. *Portrait of Père Tanguy*,  
Paris, autumn 1887. Oil on canvas,  
92 x 73 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris.



157. *Self-Portrait in a Felt Hat*,  
Paris, winter 1886-1887. Oil on cardboard,  
41 x 32 cm. Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Paul Gauguin to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Pont-Aven, end February 1888**

My dear Vincent,

I wanted to write to your brother but I know than you see him every day and I am afraid of boring him, occupied as he is from morning to night by business.

I left to work in Brittany, (still a rage to paint), and I had good hopes to have funds for that.

The little that I sold served to pay for the few pressing debts and in one month I am going to be without anything. Zero is a negative strength.

I don't want to press your brother, but a little word from you on this topic would calm me, or at least would make me be patient. My god, these questions of money are terrifying for an artist!

And if it is necessary to give some discounts don't worry, as long as I find some funds. I have just spent 15 days in bed with a fever and I am starting to work again. If I can last 5 to 6 months I believe that I will do some good canvases.

An encouraging word in answer if it is possible.

Ever Yours,

Paul Gauguin.

Pont-Aven at Mme. Gloanec

Finistère

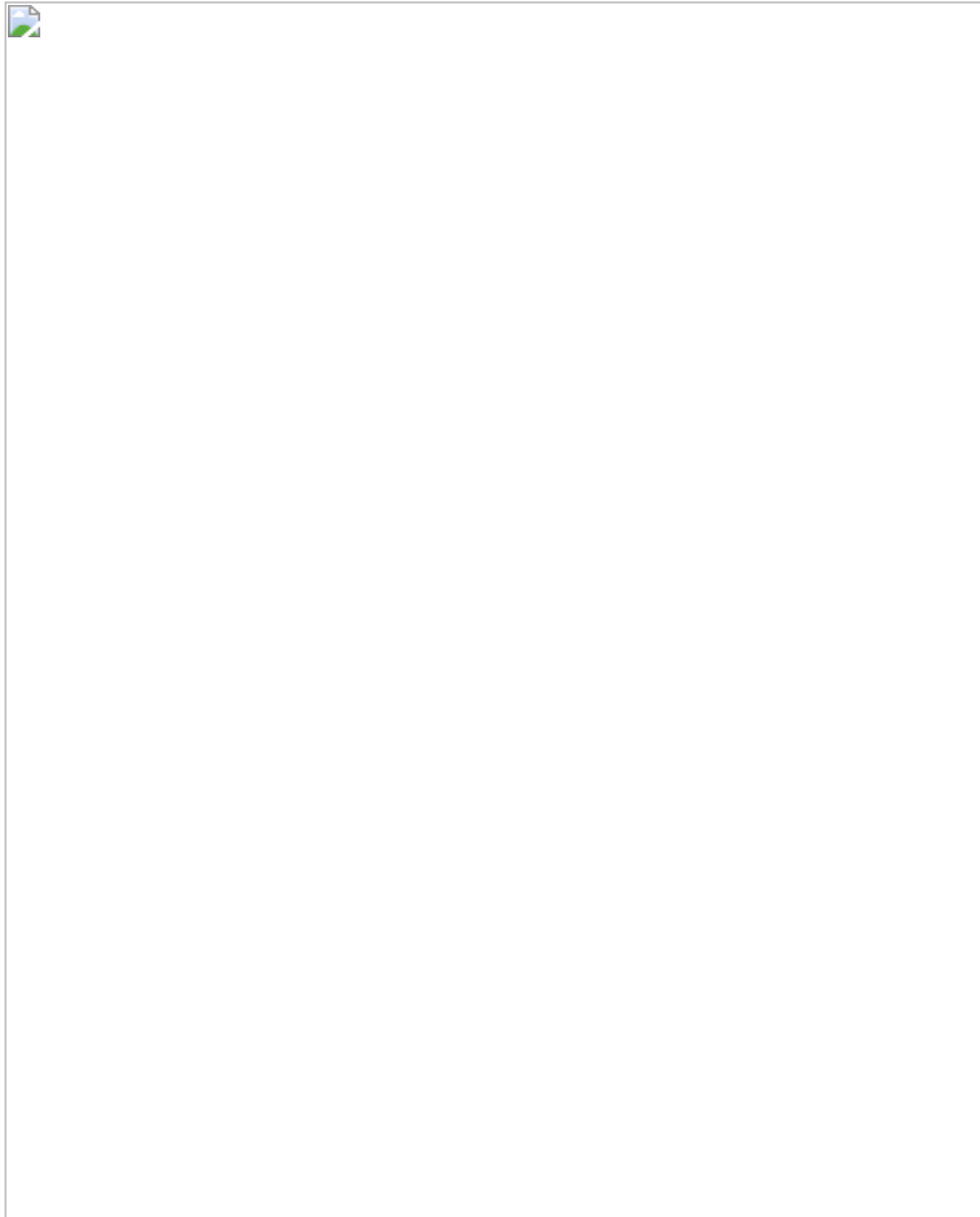




158. *A Pair of Shoes*,  
Paris, spring 1887.  
Oil on cardboard, 33 x 41 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



159. *A Pair of Shoes*,  
Paris, early 1887.  
Oil on canvas, 34 x 41.5 cm.  
The Cone Collection,  
The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore.



160. *Sunflowers*,  
Arles, August 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 92.1 x 73 cm.  
The National Gallery, London.

## Arles: 1888-1889

### ***“An artists’ house”***

On February 19th, 1888 van Gogh left Paris for Arles. Two days later he wrote to Theo:

“It seems to me almost impossible to work in Paris unless one has some place of retreat where one can recuperate and get one’s tranquillity and poise back.”[\[77\]](#)

The region of Arles reminded him not only of the Dutch landscape, but also of the Japan shown in the woodcuts. He rented a room in the Carrel Inn and set to work immediately. In the morning, he went out into the fields and gardens, where he stayed until late afternoon. He spent his evenings in the Café de la Gare, where he wrote letters and read newspapers or novels like Pierre Loti’s *Madame Chrysanthème*. It was there that he befriended the Zouave second lieutenant Paul-Eugène Milliet, the postman Joseph Roulin, and the couple Ginoux, who owned the café. In a letter to Theo, he explained *“I would rather fool myself than feel alone.”*[\[78\]](#) Van Gogh held his new friends in high esteem – later, in the time of crisis, they would become his most faithful and empathic companions – but he missed being near people with whom he could discuss art and painting.

In May of the same year, he rented two rooms in an empty house on Place Lamartine. Since the rooms were unfurnished, he slept in the Café de la Gare, having abandoned the Carrel Inn after a quarrel with the landlords. The task of decorating the house – which he called both the Yellow House and The Artists’ House – delighted him to no end. In his mind, it was to form the nucleus of an artists’ colony, a studio of the South. As he said to Theo:

“You know that I have always thought it idiotic the way painters live alone. You always lose by being isolated.”[\[79\]](#)

Dependent on his family for financial support, van Gogh began to reflect on the position of the artist in society:

“It is hard, terribly hard, to keep on working when one does not sell, and when one literally has to pay for one’s colour out of what would not be too much for eating, drinking and lodgings, however strictly calculated... All the same they are building state museums, and the like, for hundreds of thousands of guilders, but meanwhile the artists very often starve.”[\[80\]](#)

For van Gogh, museums were cemeteries. He was similarly contemptuous of the art trade:

“Given ten years as necessary to learn the profession and somebody who has struggled through six years and paid for them and then has to stop, just think how miserable that is, and how many there are like that! And those high prices one hears about, paid for work of painters who are dead and who were never paid so much while they were alive, it is a kind of tulip trade, under which the living painters suffer rather than gain any benefit. And it will also disappear like the tulip trade.”[\[81\]](#)

Van Gogh's alternative to this unhappy state of affairs was a community of artists: the painters should work together, support each other and give their works to one faithful dealer – Theo – who would pay a monthly sum to the artists, regardless of whether the works sold or not. Van Gogh tried to persuade Gauguin to join the studio of the South. For over half a year, from March to October 1888, he courted his admired colleague with letters. He asked Theo to increase his monthly allowance to 250 francs, so that Gauguin could live with him in Arles. In return, Theo would receive one painting from Gauguin. Gauguin, who was living in Brittany, stalled in his replies: sometimes he claimed to be too ill to travel, and on other occasions to be short of funds. The months of waiting for Gauguin were the most productive time in van Gogh's life. He wanted to show his friend as many new pictures as possible. At the same time, he wanted to decorate the Yellow House:

“I wanted to arrange the house from the start not for myself only, but so as to be able to put someone else up too... For a visitor there will be the prettier room upstairs, which I shall try to make as much as possible like the boudoir of a really artistic woman. Then there will be my own bedroom, which I want to be extremely simple, but with large, solid furniture, the bed, chairs and table all in white deal. Downstairs will be the studio, and another room, a studio too, but at the same time a kitchen... The room you will have then, or Gauguin if he comes, will have white walls with a decoration of great yellow sunflowers... I want to make it a real artist's house – not precious, on the contrary nothing precious, but everything from the chair to the pictures having character... I cannot tell you how much pleasure it gives me to find a big, serious job like this.”[\[82\]](#)

In the middle of August, he started the cycle of the sunflowers for the guest room:

“I am hard at it, painting with the same enthusiasm of a Marseillais eating bouillabaisse, which won't surprise you when you know that what I'm at is the painting of some big sunflowers. I have three canvases going – 1st, three huge flowers in a green vase, with a light background...; 2nd, three flowers, one gone to seed, having lost its petals, and one a bud against a royal-blue background...; 3rd, twelve flowers and buds in a yellow vase... The last one is therefore light on light, and I hope it will be the best... If I carry out this idea there will be a dozen panels. So the whole thing will be a symphony in blue and yellow.”[\[83\]](#)

Of the projected *Twelve Sunflower* pictures, he completed only two, because the 'models' disappeared too quickly. He therefore turned to a new subject: the garden of the poet. Three variations on this theme, together with the two sunflower paintings became the decoration for the guest room, which was waiting for Gauguin's arrival. The nest had been built, but it remained empty. Van Gogh tried to remain optimistic:

“If I am alone – I can't help it, but honestly I have less need of company than of furiously hard work,... It's the only time I feel I am alive, when I am drudging away at my work. If I had company, I should feel it less of a necessity; or rather, I'd work at more complicated things. But alone, I only count on the exaltation that comes to me in certain moments, and then I let myself run to extravagances.”[\[84\]](#)

At the same time, he resolved to control his exaltation:



“Don’t think that I would maintain a feverish condition artificially, but understand that I am in the midst of a complicated calculation which results in a quick succession of canvases quickly executed but calculated long beforehand. So now, when anyone says that such and such is done too quickly, you can reply that they have looked at it too quickly. Apart from that I am now busy going over all my canvases a bit before sending them to you.”[\[85\]](#)



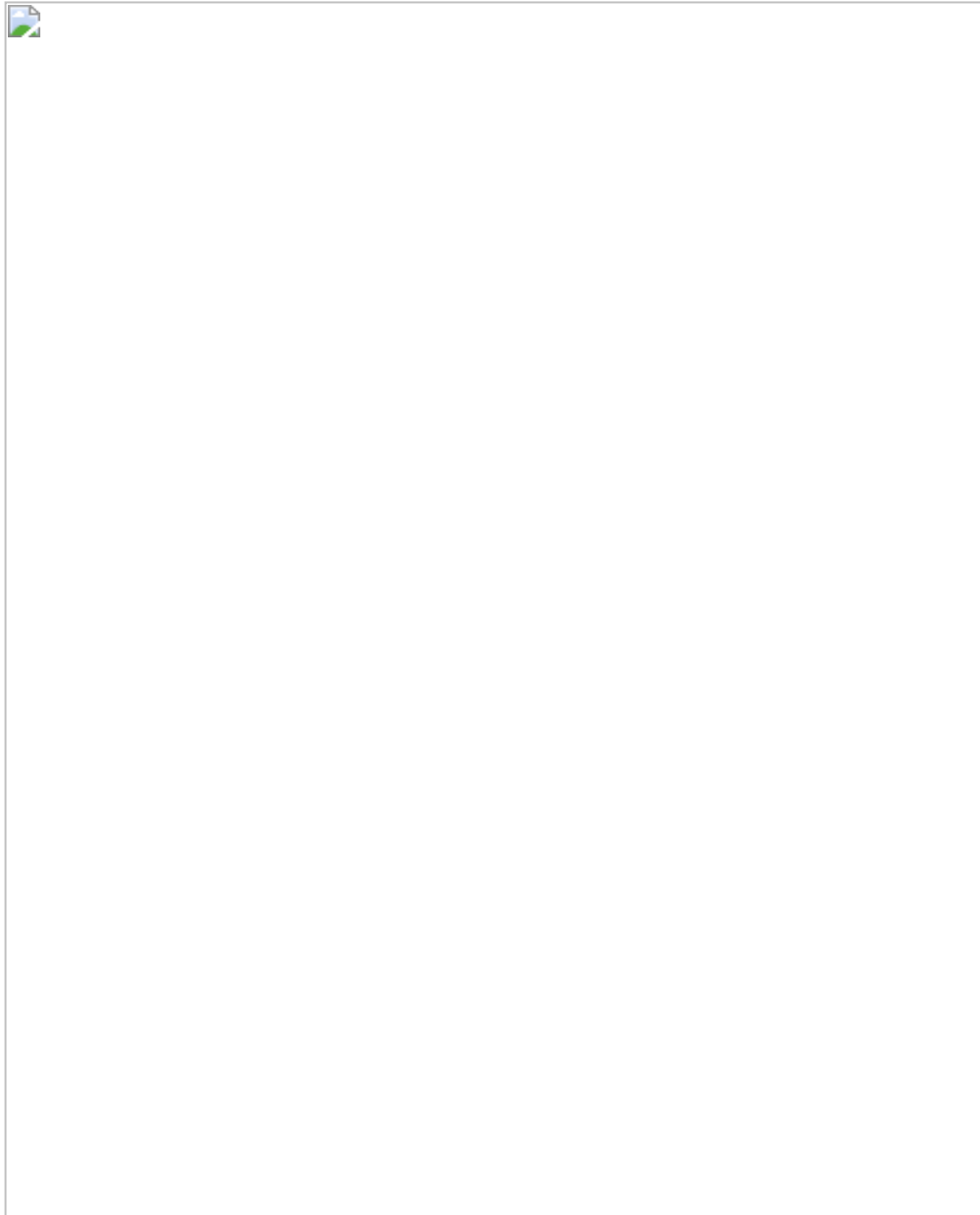
161. *The Orchard in Bloom*,  
Arles, March-April 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 72.4 x 53.3 cm.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



162. *Orchard in Blossom (Plum Trees)*,  
Arles, April 1888. Oil on canvas, 54 x 65.2 cm.  
National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.



163. *Orchard in Bloom*,  
Arles, April 1888. Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 92 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



164. *Garden of a Bath-House*,  
Arles, August 1888.  
Reed pen in brown ink, pencil on wove paper,  
61 x 49 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



On October 23rd, Paul Gauguin finally arrived in Arles. “He is very interesting as a man,” Vincent writes to Theo, “and I have every confidence that we shall do loads of things with him. He will probably produce a great deal here, and I hope perhaps I shall too.”<sup>[86]</sup> The first thing Gauguin produced was order. Fifteen years later, he wrote in his memoirs of the time in Arles: “First of all, I was shocked to find disorder everywhere and in every respect. His box of colours barely sufficed to contain all those squeezed tubes, which were never closed up, and despite all this disorder, all this mess, everything glowed on the canvas – and in his words as well.”<sup>[87]</sup> In the middle of November, Gauguin reported to his dealer and financial backer Theo:

“The good Vincent and *le grièche* Gauguin continue to make a happy couple and eat at home the little meals they prepare themselves.”<sup>[88]</sup>

Before, Vincent had eaten in restaurants, quickly exhausting the sums Theo sent him, which was between 150 and 250 francs each month. By way of comparison, the postman Roulin, who was married and had three children, earned only 135 francs. Plainly, van Gogh’s chronic lack of money was a result of his somewhat impromptu way of living. He took rooms in hotels and inns while traveling around – and didn’t like it at all. He was not extravagant: he always looked for the cheapest accommodation, and forbade himself to eat large meals.

But his acts of self-denial often bordered on the ritualistic: even when invited as a guest, he would refuse meals out of a belief that, like a monk, he should eat no more than was necessary for him to live. Even during his studies in Amsterdam, he had exhibited a tendency towards self-abnegation. He confessed to his teacher Mendes da Costa that he was beating himself with a stick as punishment for not having worked enough. A stomach disorder and dental problems were the consequence of his unbalanced diet, which consisted mostly of bread and cheese. It is doubtful, however, that these health problems were the exclusive result of poor nutrition; they might also have been symptoms of syphilis, a disease from which also Theo suffered. His course of treatment – balanced nutrition, repose, abstinence from sex – was often discussed between the brothers, and Vincent came to believe that the same way of living would cure his ills as well. Another factor that contributed to van Gogh’s financial difficulties is that he would spend large sums on colours and canvases or prints as soon as the money arrived. Here too, Gauguin was able to counterbalance the impulsiveness of his host: instead of ordering prepared canvases from Paris he sought out cheap burlap in Arles, and fashioned frames by hand. Van Gogh was impressed by his friend’s technical and practical skills. But he refused when Gauguin tried “to disentangle from that disordered brain a logical reasoning behind his critical options.”<sup>[89]</sup> Paul Gauguin saw himself in the position of sage, and relegated van Gogh to the role of his student:

“Vincent, at the moment when I arrived in Arles, was fully immersed in the Neo-Impressionist school, and he was floundering considerably, which caused him to suffer... With all these yellows on violets, all this work in complementary colours – disordered work on his part – he only arrived at subdued, incomplete, and monotonous harmonies; the sound of the clarion was missing. I undertook the task of enlightening him, which was easy for me, for I found a rich and fertile soil. Like all natures that are original and marked with the stamp of personality, Vincent had no fear of his neighbour and was not stubborn. From that day on, my van Gogh made astonishing progress.”<sup>[90]</sup>

Regarding the pictures van Gogh painted before and after Gauguin undertook him, however, there is little evidence of this progress. In March, 1888 van Gogh painted the *The Bridge at Langlois*, in July *The Mousmé* and the *Portrait of Joseph Roulin*, in August the *Sunflowers*, in September *The Poet's Garden*, *The Starry Night*, *The Yellow House*, the *Self Portrait for my Friend Paul Gauguin*, *The Café by Night* and in October *Vincent's Room at Arles*. The very paintings that Gauguin dismissed as 'subdued, incomplete and monotonous' are today regarded as his greatest masterpieces. With Gauguin at his side, van Gogh painted less and without the force he had discovered earlier that year. Discussions with his more confident colleague might have shaken his nerve. But as the year drew to a close, poor weather conditions had also made it impossible to work outside. Unlike Gauguin, van Gogh needed reality as a model. He was not able to separate his artistic process from his subjects. He strove for a synthesis of reflection and the immediate feeling he had about the things and people he painted. In his letters, he explains the meaning of certain motifs: The sunflower, which he called 'his flower', signifies gratitude. *The Sowing Man*, a subject he had borrowed from Millet, stands for the longing for the infinite. Van Gogh's aim was "to express the love of two lovers by a wedding of two complementary colours, their mingling and their opposition, the mysterious vibrations of kindred tones. To express the thought of a brow by the radiance of a light tone against a somber background. To express hope by some star, the eagerness of a soul by a sunset radiance. Certainly there is no delusive realism in that, but isn't it something that actually exists?"[91]

The love and hope he had introduced into his canvases while waiting for Gauguin were ultimately frustrated. Gauguin didn't share his views on art. That was painful enough, but van Gogh was even more hurt by the way his friend disparaged him. He had already had a similar experience with Anton van Rappard, whom he had met in Brussels. Both artists exchanged letters during the years 1881 and 1885. When Rappard criticised his *Potato Eaters*, van Gogh was not wounded by the remarks themselves – he admitted that Rappard was right in some details – but by their tone: "Now you are speaking to me and behaving to me exactly as a certain abominably arrogant Rappard studying at a certain academy did at one time." [92]

In December, 1888, Gauguin wrote to Emile Bernard: "I'm in Arles, completely out of my element because I find everything, the landscape and the people, so petty and shabby. In general, Vincent and I rarely agree on anything, especially on painting. He admires Daumier, Daubigny, Ziem, and the great Rousseau, none of whom I can stand. And, on the other hand, he detests Ingres, Raphaël, Degas, all of whom I admire... He loves my paintings, but when I'm doing them, he always finds that I've done this or that wrong. He is a romantic and I am more inclined to a primitive state. Regarding colour, he sees the possibilities of impasto as in Monticelli, whereas I hate the mess of execution, etc..." [93] At about the same time, Gauguin announced to Theo that he wanted to return to Paris:

"Vincent and I absolutely cannot live side-by-side any longer without friction because of the incompatibility of our temperaments and because he and I both need tranquillity for our work." [94]

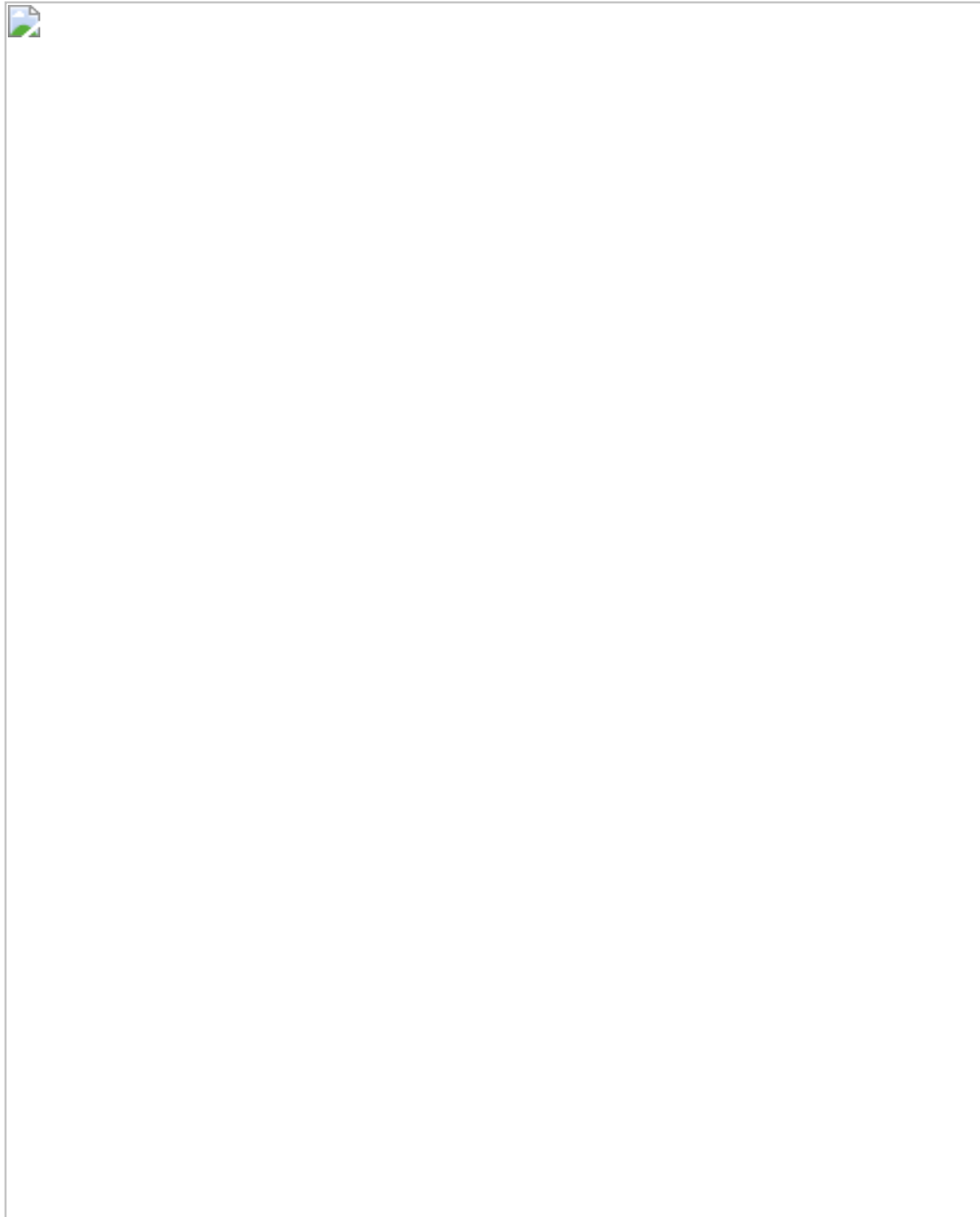
Nobody knows, finally, what happened in the last days before Christmas. In his biography of van Gogh, Matthias Arnold points out that many letters of this period are missing. He doubts that these documents – which might contain information about van Gogh's first crisis and, later, about his suicide – could have been lost while all the other letters were collected by Theo with such care.

Whatever the circumstances of their disappearance, the bulk of the available information about the events of December 23rd, 1888 comes from a less than objective witness, Paul Gauguin. “During the latter part of my stay, Vincent became excessively brusque and noisy, then silent. Several nights I surprised Vincent who, having risen, was standing over my bed. To what can I attribute my awakening just at that moment?

“Invariably it sufficed for me to say to him very gravely: ‘What’s the matter, Vincent?’ for him to go back to bed without a word and to fall into a deep sleep. I came upon the idea of doing his portrait while he painted the still life that he so loved – some sunflowers. And, the portrait finished, he said to me: “That’s me all right, but me gone mad.” The same evening we went to the café: he took a light absinthe. Suddenly he threw the glass and its contents at my head. I avoided the blow and, taking him bodily in my arms, left the café and crossed the Place Victor-Hugo; some minutes later, Vincent found himself in bed, where he fell asleep in a few seconds, not to awaken again until morning.



165. *Almond Tree in Bloom*,  
Arles, April 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 48.5 x 36 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



166. *Pink Peach Trees (Reminiscence of Mauve)*,  
Arles, March 1888. Oil on canvas, 73 x 59.5 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



“When he awoke, he said to me very calmly: “My dear Gauguin, I have a very vague memory of having “offended you last evening.” – I answered: “I gladly forgive you with all my heart, but yesterday’s scene could happen again, and if I were struck I might lose control of myself and strangle you. So permit me to write to your brother and announce my return.” My God, what a day! When evening had arrived and I had quickly eaten my dinner, I felt the need to go out alone and take in the air, scented with flowering laurels. I had already almost crossed the Place Victor Hugo, when I heard behind me a familiar short footstep, rapid and irregular.

“I turned just at the moment when Vincent rushed towards me, an open razor in his hand. My look at that moment must have been powerful indeed, for he stopped, and lowering his head, took off running in the direction of the house. Was I lax in that moment, and oughtn’t I to have disarmed him and sought to calm him down? Often I have questioned my conscience, but I do not reproach myself at all. Let him who will cast the stone at me. Only a short stretch and I was in a good hotel in Arles, where, after asking the time, I took a room and went to bed.

“Very agitated, I could not fall asleep until about three in the morning, and I awoke rather late, about seven-thirty. Upon arriving at the square, I saw a large crowd assembled. Near our house, there were some gendarmes and a little gentleman in a bowler hat, who was the police commissioner. Here is what had happened. Van Gogh returned to the house and, immediately, cut off his ear close to the head. He must have taken some time in stopping the hemorrhage, for the next day there were many wet towels scattered about on the floor tiles of two rooms downstairs. “When he was in good enough condition to go out, his head covered up by a Basque beret pulled all the way down, he went straight to a house where, for want of a fellow-countrywoman, one can find a chance acquaintance, and gave the ‘sentry’ his ear, carefully washed and enclosed in an envelope. “Here,” he said, “a remembrance of me.”



167. *Small Pear Tree in Blossom*,  
Arles, March 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 46 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

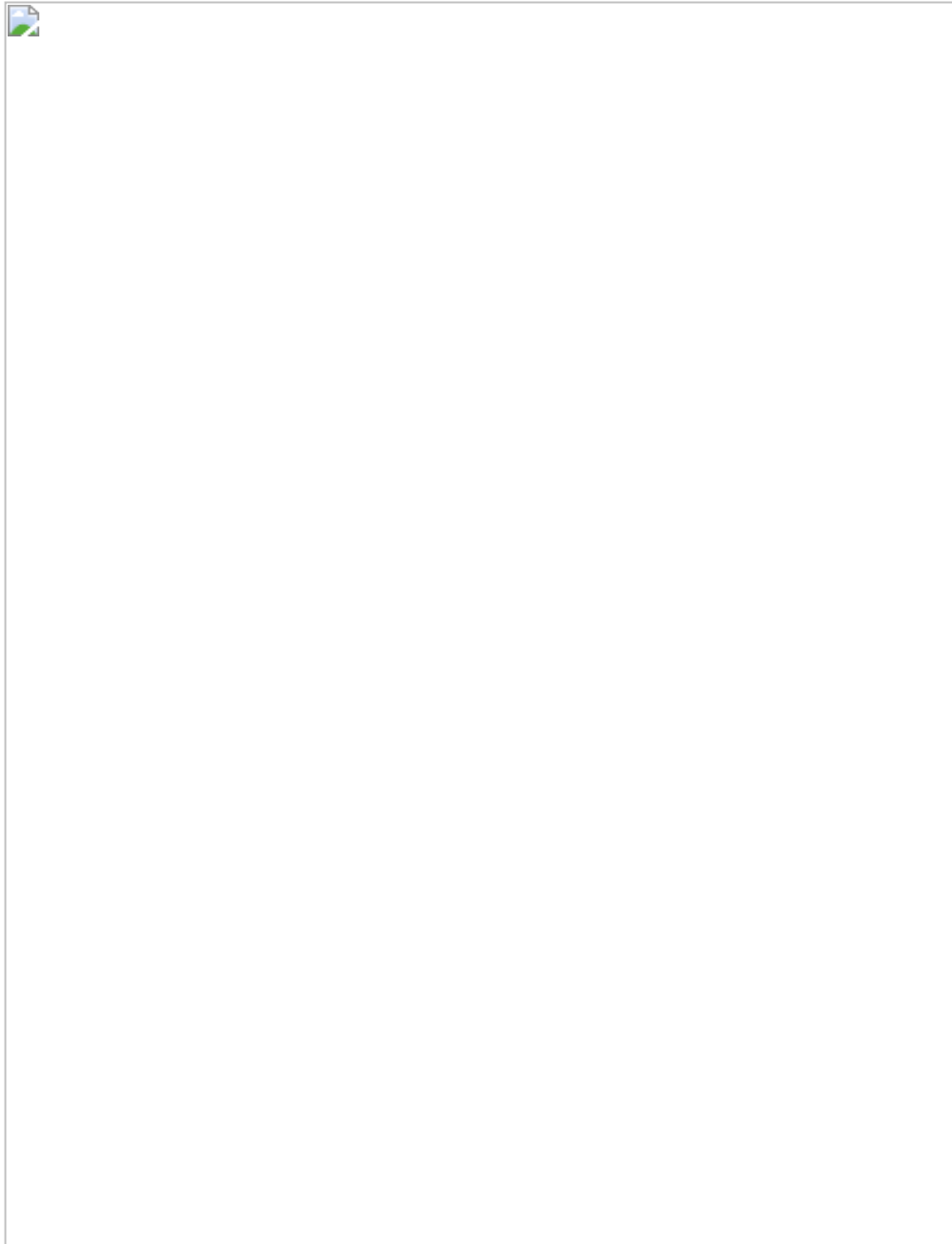
“Then he fled and returned home, where he went to bed and slept. He took the trouble, however, to close the shutters and to set a lighted lamp on a table near the window. Ten minutes later, the whole street given over to the *filles de joie* was in commotion and chattering about the event. I had not the slightest inkling of all this when I appeared on the threshold of our house and the gentleman with the bowler hat said to me point-blank, in a more than severe tone: “What have you done, sir, to your comrade?” – “I don’t know.” – “Oh, yes, ...you know very well, ...he is dead.” I would not wish anyone such a moment, and it took me a few long minutes to be able to think clearly and to repress the beating of my heart.

“Anger, indignation, and grief as well, and the shame of all those gazes that were tearing my entire being to pieces suffocated me, and I stuttered when I said, “Alright, sir, let us go upstairs, and we can explain ourselves up there.” In the bed, Vincent lay completely enveloped in the sheets, curled up like a gun hammer; he appeared lifeless.

“Gently, very gently, I touched the body, whose warmth surely announced life. For me, it was as if I had regained all my powers of thought and energy. Almost in a whisper, I said to the commissioner of police: ‘Be so kind, sir, as to awaken this man with great care and, if he asks for me, tell him that I have left for Paris. The sight of me could be fatal to him.’”[\[95\]](#)

Compared with the reports of other witnesses, such as that of the policeman Alphonse Robert, Gauguin’s story is incorrect on some minor points. Van Gogh did not cut off his whole ear, but only a piece above the lobe. He gave this ‘present’ to the prostitute Rachel, and not to the ‘sentry.’ Gauguin’s account offers little insight into the motives behind his host’s act of self-mutilation. Perhaps van Gogh feared that his friend would make good his threat to leave him. Gauguin’s departure would have been doubly traumatising, for it also meant the end of the artists’ house. Another reason for his distress might have been Theo’s engagement with Johanna Bonger. Arnold tells us that van Gogh was informed of his brother’s plans to marry on December 23rd.

This change would surely have had an impact on his life. Perhaps Theo, faced with the expense of setting up his new household, would no longer be able to offer the support – financial or intellectual – on which his brother had come to depend. Gauguin informed Theo about Vincent’s crisis, and the younger van Gogh arrived in Arles on December 25th, but stayed for only a very short time. In all likelihood, he returned to Paris the same day, accompanied by Gauguin.



168. *Blossoming Almond Branch in a Glass*,  
Arles, early March 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 24 x 19 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



169. *Oleanders*,  
Arles, August 1888. Oil on canvas, 60 x 73 cm.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, c. 14 March 1888**

My dear Theo,

I thank you very much for your letter, which I had not dared to expect so soon, as far as the 50-fr. note which you added was concerned.

I see that you have not yet had an answer from Tersteeg. I don't think that we need press him with a new letter. However, if you have any official business to transact with B.V. & Co. in The Hague, you might mention in a P. S. that you are rather surprised that he has in no way acknowledged the receipt of the letter in question.

As for my work, I brought back a size 15 canvas today. It is a drawbridge over which passes a little cart, standing out against a blue sky - the river blue as well, the banks orange coloured with grass and a group of women washing linen in smocks and multicoloured caps.

And another landscape with a little rustic bridge and washerwomen also. Finally an avenue of plane trees close to the station. Altogether 12 studies since I've been here.

The weather here is changeable, often windy with turbulent skies, but the almond trees are beginning to flower everywhere. I am very happy that the paintings are going to the Independents. You are right to go to see Signac at his house. I was very glad to read in today's letter that he made a more favourable impression on you than the first time. In any case I am glad to know that after today you will not be alone in the apartment.

Remember me kindly to Koning. Are you well? I am better myself, except that eating is a real ordeal, since I have a touch of fever and no appetite, but it's only a question of time and patience.

I have company in the evening, for the young Danish painter who is here is a decent soul: his work is dry, correct and timid, but I do not object to that when the painter is young and intelligent. He originally began studying medicine: he knows Zola, de Goncourt, Guy de Maupassant, and he has enough money to do himself well. And with all this, a very genuine desire to do very different work than what he is producing now.

I think he would be wise to delay his return home for a year, or to come back here after a short visit to his friends.

But, my dear brother, you know that I feel as though I am in Japan - I say no more than that, and I still haven't seen anything in its usual splendour yet.

That's why (even though I'm vexed that just now expenses are heavy and the paintings worthless), that's why I don't despair of the future success of this idea of a long sojourn in the Midi.



170. *Garden in Bloom with Path*,  
Arles, July 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 72 x 91 cm.  
Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague.



171. *Memory of the Garden at Etten (Ladies of Arles)*,  
Arles, November 1888. Oil on canvas,  
73 x 92 cm. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

Here I am seeing new things, I am learning, and if I take it easy, my body doesn't refuse to function.

For many reasons I should like to establish some sort of little retreat, where the poor cab horses of Paris - that is yourself and several of our friends, the poor impressionists - could go out to pasture when they get too exhausted.

I was present at the Inquiry into a crime committed at the door of a brothel here; two Italians killed two Zouaves. I took advantage of the opportunity to go into one of the brothels in a little street called des ricolettes. That is the extent of my amorous adventures among the Arlésiennes.

The mob all but (the Southerner, like Tartarin, being more energetic in good intentions than in action) - the mob, I repeat, all but lynched the murderers locked up in the town hall, but in retaliation all the Italians - men and women, the Savoyard monkeys included - have been forced to leave town.

I should not have told you about this, except that it means I've seen the streets of this town full of excited crowds. And it was indeed a fine sight.

I made my last three studies with the perspective frame which you know I use. I attach some importance to the use of the frame because it seems not unlikely to me that in the near future many artists will make use of it, just as the old German and Italian painters certainly did, and, as I am inclined to think, the Flemish too.

The modern use of it may differ from the ancient practice, but in the same way isn't it true that in the process of painting in oils one gets very different effects today from those of the men who invented the process, Jan and Hubert van Eyck? And the moral of this is that it's my constant hope that I am not working for myself alone. I believe in the absolute necessity of a new art of colour, of design, and - of the artistic life. And if we work in that faith, it seems to me that there is a chance that we do not hope in vain.

You must know that I am actually ready to send some studies off to you, only it is impossible to roll them up yet. A hearty handshake. On Sunday I shall write to Bernard and de Lautrec, because I solemnly promised to, and shall send you those letters as well. I am deeply sorry for Gauguin's plight, especially because his health is shaken: he no longer has the kind of temperament that profits from hardships - on the contrary, this will only

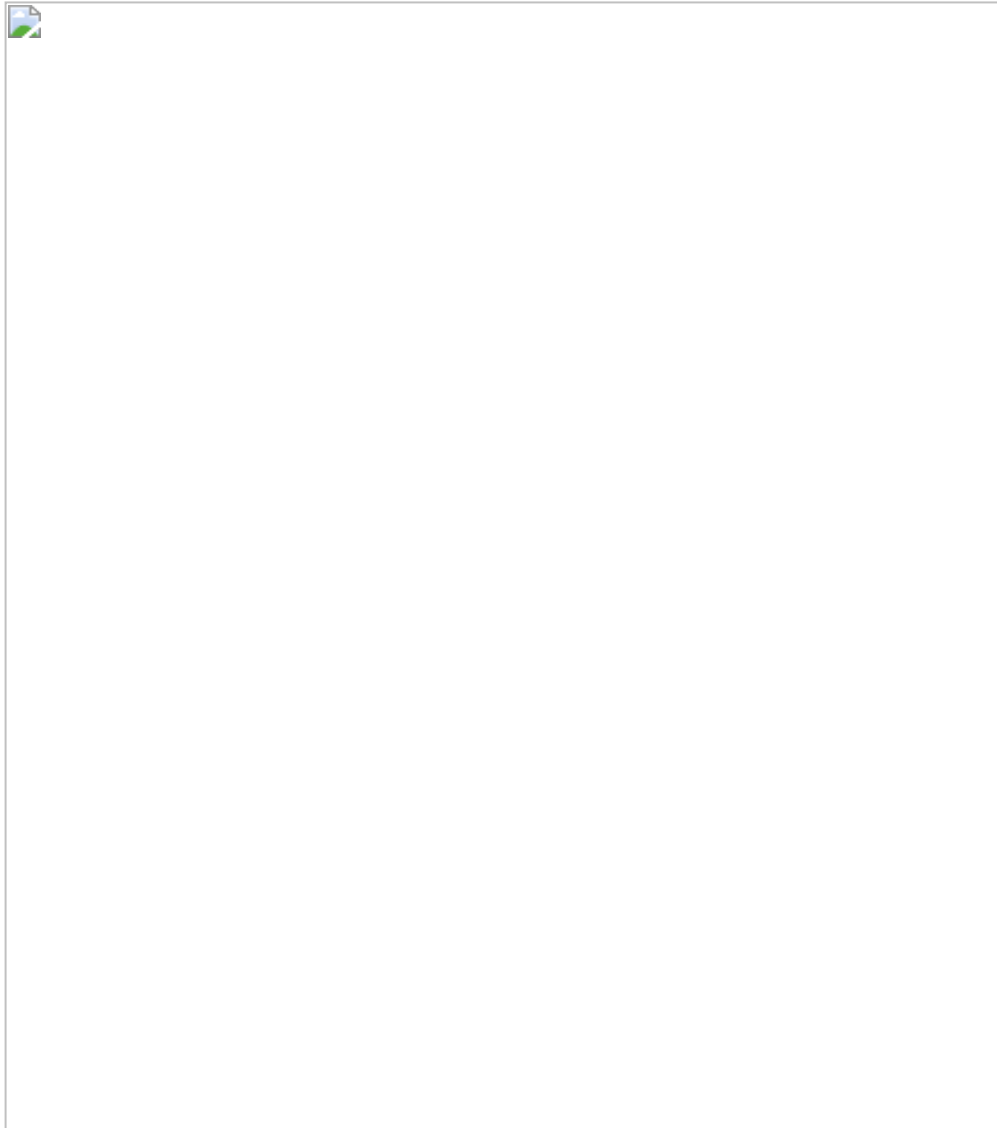


exhaust him from here on, and that will spoil him for his work. Goodbye for the present.

Ever yours, Vincent



172. *Entrance to the Park at Arles*,  
Arles, September 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 72.5 x 91 cm.  
The Philips Collection, Washington, D.C.



173. *The Artist on the Road to Tarascon*,  
Arles, July 1888. Oil on canvas, 48 x 44 cm.  
Destroyed in the Second World War.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Emile Bernard**  
**Arles, c. 18 June 1888**

My dear Bernard,

Forgive me for writing in haste, I'm afraid my letter will be illegible, but I did want to reply at once.

Do you realise that we have been very stupid, Gauguin, you and I, in not going to the same place? But when Gauguin left, I still wasn't sure if I could get away, and when you left, that awful money business, and the bad reports I sent you about the cost of living here, stopped you from coming.

It wouldn't have been such a stupid thing to do if we had all gone to Arles together, for with three of us here, we could have done our own housekeeping. And now that I have found my bearings a bit more, I am beginning to discover the advantages. For my part, I'm getting on better here than I did in the north. I even work right in the middle of the day, in the full sun, with no shade at all, out in the wheat fields, and lo and behold, I am as happy as a cicada. My God, if only I had known this country at 25 instead of coming here at 35! At that time I was fascinated by grey, or rather lack of colour. I kept dreaming of Millet, and then I also had such acquaintances among the Dutch painters as Mauve, Israëls, etc...

[Here Vincent drew a sketch of The Sower.]

Here is a sketch of a sower: a large piece of land with clods of ploughed earth, for the most part a definite purple. A field of ripe wheat, in yellow ochre with a little carmine. The sky chrome yellow, almost as bright as the sun itself, which is chrome yellow 1 with a little white, while the rest of the sky is chrome yellow 1 and 2 mixed. Thus very yellow.

The Sower's smock is blue and his trousers white.

Size 25 canvas, square.

There are many touches of yellow in the soil, neutral tones produced by mixing purple with the yellow, but I couldn't care less what the colours are in reality. I'd sooner do those naïve pictures out of old almanacs, old farmers' almanacs where hail, snow, rain or fine weather are depicted in a wholly primitive manner, like the one Anquetin used so successfully in his *Moisson*. To be honest with you, I have absolutely no objection to the countryside, since I grew up in it - I am still enchanted by snatches of the past, have a hankering after the eternal, of which the sower and the sheaf of

corn are the symbols. But when shall I ever get round to doing the starry sky,  
that picture which is always in my mind?





174. *The Stagecoach of Tarascon*,  
Arles, October 1888. Oil on canvas, 72 x 92 cm.  
The Henry and Rose Pearlman Foundation, New York.



175. *Encampment of Gypsies with Caravans*,  
Arles, August 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 45 x 51 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Alas, alas, it is just as the excellent fellow Cyprien says in J.K. Huysman's *En Ménage*: the most beautiful paintings are those which you dream about when you lie in bed smoking a pipe, but which you never paint.

Yet you have to make a start, no matter how incompetent you feel in the face of inexpressible perfection, of the overwhelming beauty of nature.

How I should like to see the study you have done of the brothel!

I am always reproaching myself for not having done any figures here yet.

[Sketch of Summer Evening drawn here.]

Herewith another landscape. Setting sun? Rising moon?

A summer evening, anyway.

Town purple, celestial body yellow, sky green-blue. The wheat has all the hues of old gold, copper, green-gold or red-gold, yellow-gold, yellow-bronze, red-green. Size 30 canvas, square.

I painted it at the height of the mistral. My easel was fixed in the ground with iron pegs, a method I recommend to you. You push the legs of the easel deep into the ground, then drive iron pegs fifty centimetres long into the ground beside them (See above sketch). You tie the whole lot together with rope. This way you can work in the wind.

This is what I wanted to say about black and white. Take *The Sower*. The picture is divided in two; one half is yellow, the upper part, the lower part is purple. Well, the white trousers help rest the eye and distract it just as the excessive contrast of yellow and purple starts to jar. There you are, that's what I wanted to say.

I know a second lieutenant in the Zouaves here; his name is Milliet. I give him drawing lessons - with my perspective frame - and he is beginning to do some drawings and, honestly, I've seen far worse. He is keen to learn, has been in Tonkin, etc... He is leaving for Africa in October. If you were to join the Zouaves, he would take you along and guarantee you a fairly large measure of freedom to paint, at least if you were willing to help him with his artistic plans. Might this be of any use to you? If so, let me know as soon as possible.

One reason for working is that the canvases are worth money. Since you doubt that, you may call this reason fairly prosaic. But it is true. One reason for not working is that canvases and paint simply swallow up our money while they are waiting to be sold.

Drawings, on the other hand, don't cost a lot.



176. *The Harvest*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
72.5 x 92 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



177. *View of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas, 64 x 53 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.





178. *The Old Mill*,  
Arles, September 1888. Oil on canvas,  
64.5 x 54 cm. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo.



179. *Street in Saintes-Maries*,  
Arles, early June 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 38 x 46.1 cm.  
Private Collection, United States.

Gauguin too is bored at Pont-Aven, complains just like you of his isolation. If only you could go and see him! But I haven't any idea whether he means to stay, and I'm inclined to think he's planning to go to Paris. He told me he thought you would come to Pont-Aven. My God, if only all three of us were here! You will say that it's too out of the way. All right, but think of the winter, for here you can work all year round. The reason why I love this country is that I have less to fear from the cold, which, because it stops my blood circulating properly, makes it impossible for me to think or even do anything at all.

You will see that for yourself when you are a soldier. Then your melancholy will be gone, which could easily be the result of your having too little or the wrong blood, which I don't really think is the case.

It's the fault of that damned foul wine in Paris and those foul greasy steaks.

My God, I had reached the point where my blood was no longer circulating at all, literally no longer at all. But after four weeks it has started to circulate again.

However, my dear friend, at the same time I have had, just like you, a fit of melancholy, from which I would have suffered as much as you, had I not welcomed it with great pleasure as a sign that I was recovering - which is indeed what happened.

So, don't go back to Paris but stay in the countryside, for you will need your strength to come through the trial of serving in Africa. Well then, the more blood you produce beforehand, good blood, the better it will be, for over there in the heat you may not be able to do it quite so easily.

Painting and fucking a lot don't go together, it softens the brain. Which is a bloody nuisance.

The symbol of St. Luke, the patron saint of painters, is, as you know, an ox. So you just be patient as an ox if you want to work in the artistic field. Still, bulls are lucky not to have to work at that foul business of painting.

But what I wanted to say is this. After the period of melancholy is over you will be stronger than before, you will recover your health, and you will find the scenery round you so beautiful that you will want to do nothing but paint.

I think that your poetry will change in the same way as your painting. After a few eccentric things, you have succeeded in doing some with

Egyptian calm and a great simplicity.

“Que l’heure est donc brève  
Qu’on passe en aimant,  
C’est moins qu’un instant,  
Un peu plus qu’un rêve.  
Le temps nous enlève  
Notre enchantement.”

[How short, then, the hour  
One spends in loving,  
It is less than an instant,  
Little more than a dream.  
Time strips us of  
Our enchantment.]

That’s not by Baudelaire, I don’t know who wrote it. They’re the words of a song found in Daudet’s Nabab - that’s where I took it from - but doesn’t it express the idea just like a shrug of the shoulders from a real lady?

The other day I read Loti’s Madame Chrysanthème, it includes interesting details about Japan.

My brother is holding a Claude Monet exhibition at the moment which I should very much like to see. Guy de Maupassant among others came to have a look, and said that he’ll be coming often to the Boulevard Montmartre in the future.

I must go and paint, so I’ll stop; I’ll probably write again soon. A thousand apologies for my not putting enough stamps on that letter, even though I stuck them on at the post office, nor is this the first time that it has happened here that, being in doubt and enquiring at the counter, I have been given the wrong information about the postage. You have no idea of the indifference, the unconcern of the people here. Anyway, you’ll soon be seeing all that with your own eyes, in Africa. Thanks for your letter, I hope to write again soon, at a moment when I’m in less of a rush.

With a handshake,

Vincent

Louis Anquetin, Harvest, 1887.



180. *Three White Cottages in Saintes-Maries*,  
Arles, early June 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 41.5 cm.  
Kunsthhaus Zürich, Zürich.





181. *Farmhouse in Provence*,  
Arles, June 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 46.1 x 60.9 cm.  
Ailsa Mellon Bruce Collection,  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, 28 June 1888**

My dear Theo,

I suppose it was to convince me that, being myself one of the most absent-minded of mortals, I have no right whatever to reproach these Southerners with their carelessness. I was idiot enough once more to address my letter 54 Rue de Laval, instead of 54 Rue Lepic, so the post-office clerks, who sent me back the letter opened, have had the pleasure of edifying themselves by the contemplation of Bernard's brothel. I hasten to send on the letter as it is.

This morning I received part of the order for paints from Tanguy.

His cobalt is too bad for us to order any more of it from him. As his chromes are rather good, we can go on ordering those. But instead of carmine he sent some dark madder, which isn't too important, but not to have any more carmine at all would mean a very serious shortage in his poor old show.

It is not his fault, but in the future I will put "Tanguy" beside the names of the paints that one can buy from him. Yesterday and today I worked on *The Sower*, which I have completely worked over. The sky is yellow and green, the ground violet and orange. There is certainly a picture of this kind to be painted of this splendid subject, and I hope it will be done someday, either by me or by someone else.

This is the point. The "Christ in the Boat" by Eugène Delacroix and Millet's "The Sower" are absolutely different in execution. The "Christ in the Boat" - I am speaking of the sketch in blue and green with touches of violet, red and a little citron-yellow for the nimbus, the halo - speaks a symbolic language through colour alone.

Millet's "Sower" is a colourless grey, like Israëls's pictures.

Now, could you paint the Sower in colour, with a simultaneous contrast of, for instance, yellow and violet (like the Apollo ceiling of Delacroix's which is just that, yellow and violet), yes or no? Why, yes. Well, do it then. Yes, that is what old Martin said, "The masterpiece is up to you." But try it, and you tumble into a regular metaphysical philosophy of colour à la Monticelli, a mess that is damnably difficult to get out of with honour.

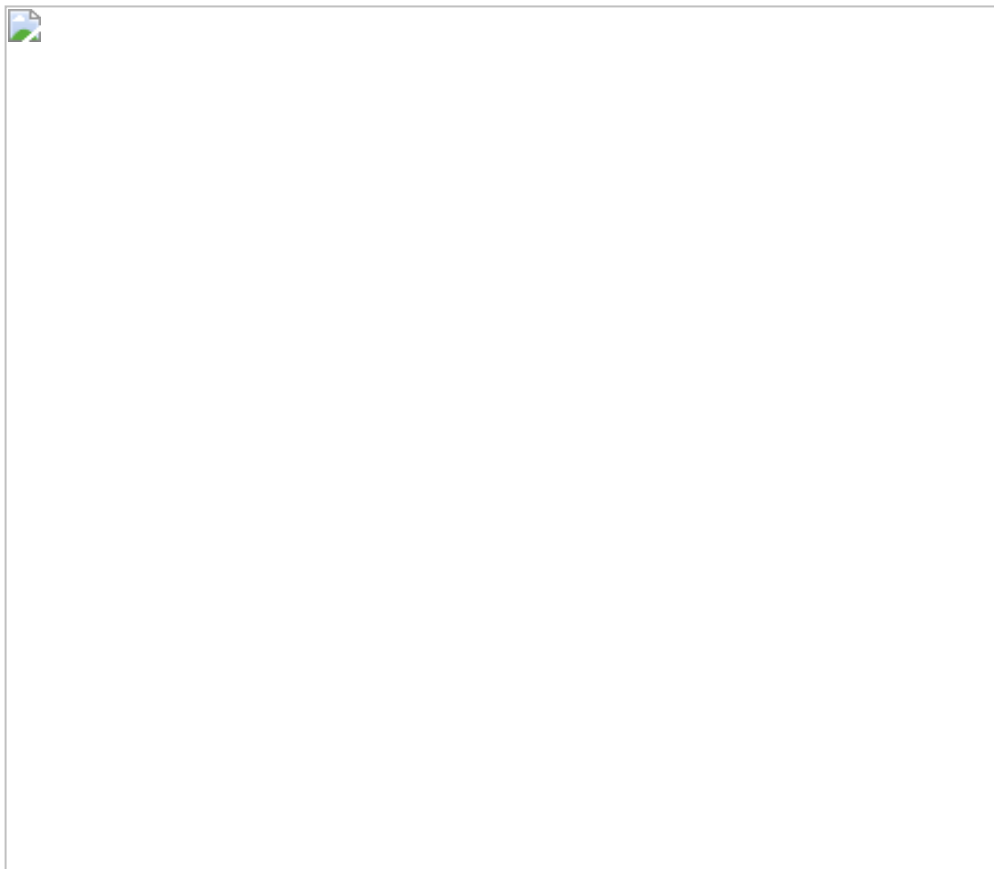
And it makes you as absent-minded as a sleepwalker. And yet if only one could do something good.

Well, let's be of good heart, and not despair. I hope to send you this attempt along with some others soon. I have a view of the Rhône - the iron bridge at Trinquetaille - in which the sky and the river are the colour of absinthe; the quays, a shade of lilac; the figures leaning on their elbows on the parapet, blackish; the iron bridge, an intense blue, with a note of vivid orange in the blue background, and a note of intense malachite green. Another very crude effort, and yet I am trying to get at something utterly heartbroken and therefore utterly heartbreaking.

Nothing from Gauguin. I certainly hope to get your letter tomorrow. Forgive my carelessness. A handshake.

Ever yours, Vincent

Many thanks for the paints. Goodbye for now.



182. *Langlois Bridge at Arles*,  
Arles, April 1888. Oil on canvas,  
60 x 65 cm. Private Collection, Paris.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, 29 June 1888**

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter, for the 50 franc note and the package of Tasset's paints and canvases which has just arrived. He has put in his bill, which comes to 50.85 fr., so that I have been able to check his prices and compare them with Édouard's. They are considerably lower than Édouard's, so that with the 20% discount, we have nothing to complain of. As for his canvas at 4.50 fr., I shall probably now be able to find out the manufacturer's price per piece.

Your letter brings great news, namely that Gauguin agrees to our plan. Certainly the best thing would be for him to come rushing here at once. Instead of getting out of a mess, he will probably get into one if he goes to Paris first.

Perhaps he might make a deal with the pictures he will be bringing along with him, which would be great luck. Herewith the reply.

I only want to say this, that not only am I enthusiastic about painting in the South, but equally so about the North, because I am in better health than six months ago. So that if it is wiser to go to Brittany, where you get board and lodging so cheaply - from the point of view of expense I am certainly ready to come back to the North. But it would be good for him too to come to the Midi, especially as it will already be winter in the North in four months. And it seems so certain to me that two people doing precisely the same work ought, if circumstances prevent them spending more, to be able to live at home on bread, wine, and anything in short that you'd want to add. The difficulty is eating at home alone. The restaurants here are expensive because everybody eats at home.

Certainly the Picards and the Leonardo da Vincis too are not less beautiful because they are few, and on the other hand the Montcellis, the Daumiers, the Corots, the Daubignys and the Millets are not ugly because in so many cases they have been painted with very great rapidity and because there are relatively a good many of them. As for landscapes, I begin to find that some done more rapidly than ever are the best of what I do. For instance, the one I sent you the cartoon of, the harvest, and the stacks too. It is true that I have to retouch the whole to adjust the brushwork a bit, and to make the touch



harmonious, but all the essential work was done in a single long sitting, and I change them as little as possible when I'm retouching.

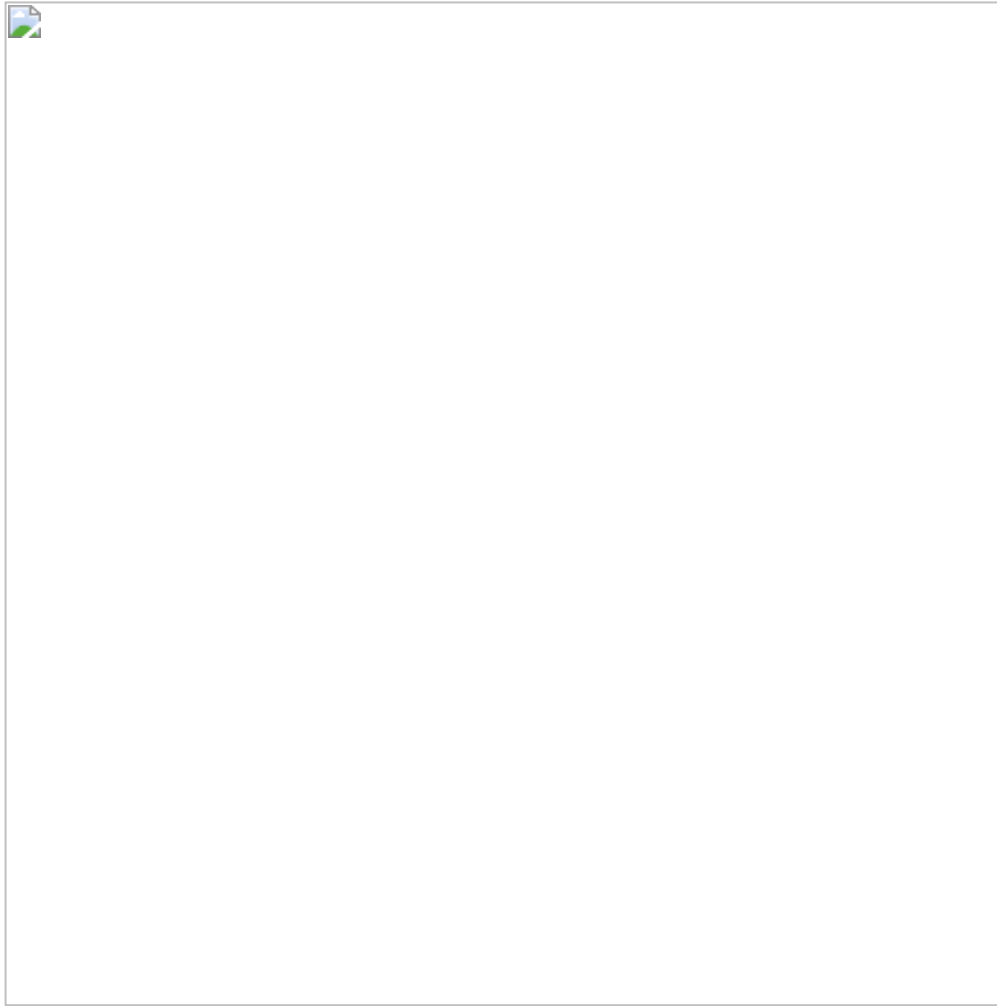
But when I come home after a spell like that, I assure you my head is so tired that if that kind of work keeps recurring, as it has done since this harvest began, I become hopelessly absent-minded and incapable of heaps of ordinary things.

It is at times like these that the prospect of not being alone is not disagreeable.

And very often indeed I think of that excellent painter Monticelli - who they said was such a drinker, and off his head - when I come back myself from the mental labour of balancing the six essential colours, red - blue - yellow - orange - lilac - green. Sheer work and calculation, with one's mind strained to the utmost, like an actor on the stage in a difficult part, with a hundred things to think of at once in a single half hour.



183. *Woman with an Umbrella on  
the Langlois Bridge at Arles,*  
Arles, May 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 64 cm.  
Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne.



184. *The Drawbridge near Arles*,  
Arles, April 1888. Watercolour on paper,  
30 x 30 cm. Private Collection.

After that, the only thing to bring ease and distraction, in my case and other people's too, is to stun oneself with a lot of drinking or heavy smoking. Not very virtuous, no doubt, but it's to return to the subject of Monticelli. I'd like to see a drunkard in front of a canvas or on the boards. It is too gross a lie, all the Roquette woman's malicious, Jesuitical slanders about Monticelli.

Monticelli, the logical colourist, able to pursue the most complicated calculations, subdivided according to the scales of tones that he was balancing, certainly over-strained his brain at this work, just as Delacroix did, and Richard Wagner.

And if perhaps he did drink, it was because he - and Jongkind too - having a stronger constitution than Delacroix, and more physical ailments (Delacroix was better off), well, if they hadn't drunk - I for one am inclined to believe - their nerves would have rebelled, and played them other tricks: Jules and Edmond de Goncourt said the very same thing, word for word - "We used to smoke very strong tobacco to stupefy ourselves" in the furnace of creation.

Don't think that I would maintain a feverish condition artificially, but understand that I am in the midst of a complicated calculation long beforehand. So now, when anyone says that such and such is done too quickly, you can reply that they have looked at it too quickly. Apart from that I am now busy going over all my canvases a bit before sending them to you. But during the harvest my work was not any easier than what the peasants who were actually harvesting were doing.

Far from complaining of it, it is just at these times in artistic life, even though it is not the real one, that I feel almost as happy as I could be in the ideal, in that real life.

If all goes well, and Gauguin sees fit to join us, we could put the thing on a firmer footing by suggesting he put all his pictures together with mine, and share profit and loss. But either that will not happen, or it will happen of itself, according to whether he thinks my painting good or bad, and also according to whether or not we co-operate.

Now I must write to Russell and I am going to urge him to make an exchange with me. I must work hard to try to sell something on my part to help with the expenses, but we must be of good heart in spite of the difficulties, and working as we are to safeguard the artists' life, it will fire our blood.

A handshake, I'll write again soon. I'm going into the Camargue for two or three days to make some drawings there. I am glad that you are sending for our sister.

Ever yours, Vincent

I'll write Mourier one of these days, you will read the letter, you will see how I will talk to him - I can see the picture from here!!! the head like a Delaroche.

Have patience with M. a little longer. Perhaps he is going through a crisis.





185. *Boats on the Beach of Saintes-Maries*,  
Arles, June 1888. Pencil, pen and Indian ink,  
watercolour on paper, 39 x 54 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.



186. *Fishing Boats on the Beach at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*,  
Arles, late June 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 81.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, c. 21 August 1888**

My dear Theo,

I write in great haste to tell you that I have had a note from Gauguin, saying that he has not written much, but that he is quite ready to come South as soon as the opportunity arises.

They are enjoying themselves very much painting, arguing and fighting with the worthy Englishmen; he speaks well of Bernard's work, and B. speaks well of Gauguin's.

I am hard at it, painting with the enthusiasm of a Marseillais eating bouillabaisse, which won't surprise you when you know that what I'm at is the painting of some big sunflowers.

I have three canvases going - 1st, three huge flowers in a green vase, with a light background, a size 15 canvas; 2nd, three flowers, one gone to seed, having lost its petals, and one a bud against a royal-blue background, size 25 canvas; 3rd, twelve flowers and buds in a yellow vase (size 30 canvas). The last one is therefore light on light, and I hope it will be the best. Probably I shall not stop at that. Now that I hope to live with Gauguin in a studio of our own, I want to make decorations for the studio. Nothing but big flowers. Next door to your shop, in the restaurant, you know there is a lovely decoration of flowers; I always remember the big sunflowers in the window there.

If I carry out this idea there will be a dozen panels. So the whole thing will be a symphony in blue and yellow. I am working at it every morning from sunrise on, for the flowers fade so soon, and the thing is to do the whole in one rush.

You were quite right to tell Tasset that he must give us some tubes of colour for the 15 francs carriage not prepaid on the two packages.

When I have finished these sunflowers, I may need yellow and blue perhaps. If so I will send a small order accordingly. I very much like the ordinary canvas of Tasset's which was 50 centimes more expensive than Bourgeois's; it is very well prepared.

I am very glad that G. is well.

I am beginning to like the South more and more.

I am working on another study of dusty thistles, with an innumerable swarm of white and yellow butterflies. [Painting lost]

I have again missed some models which I had hoped to have these last few days. Koning has written saying that he is going to live in The Hague, and that he means to send you some studies.

I have heaps of ideas for new canvases. I saw again today the same coal boat with the workmen unloading it that I told you about before, at the same place as the boats loaded with sand which I sent you a drawing of. It would be a splendid subject. Only I am beginning more and more to try a simple technique which is perhaps not impressionistic. I would like to paint in such a way that everybody, at least if they have eyes, would see it. I am writing in a hurry, but I wanted to enclose a few words to our sister.

A handshake, I must get back to work.

Ever yours, Vincent

Gauguin said that Bernard has made an album of my sketches and has shown it to him.



187. *Seascape with Sailboats*,  
Arles, June 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 44 x 53 cm.  
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.



188. *Canal with Washer Women*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
74 x 60 cm. Private Collection, New York.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, c. 27 August 1888**

My dear Theo,

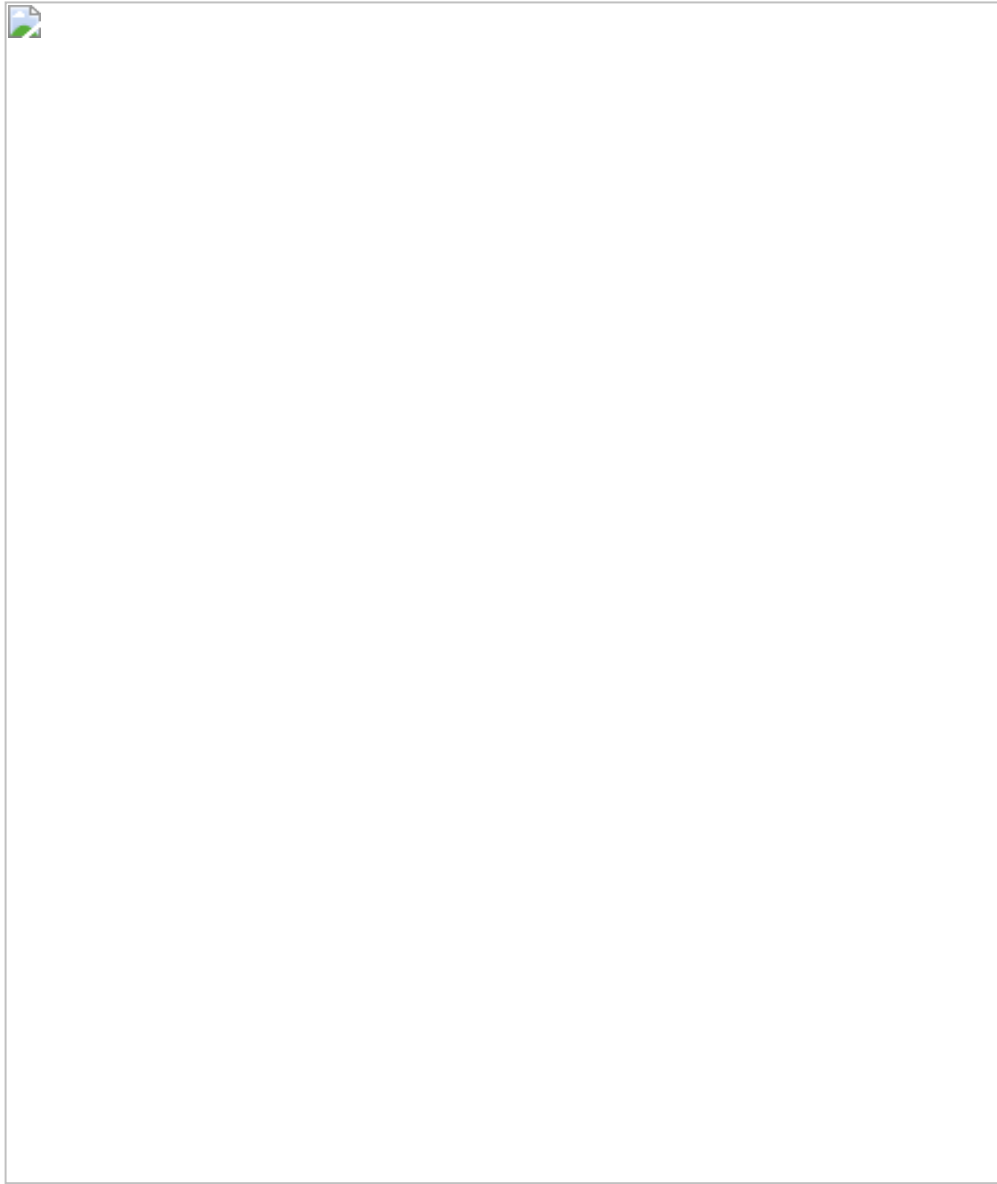
Would you like to ask Tasset's opinion on the following question? To me it seems as though the more finely a colour is brayed, the more it becomes saturated with oil. Now needless to say, we don't care overmuch for oil.

If we painted like M. Gérôme and the other delusive photographers, we should doubtless ask for very finely brayed colours. But we on the contrary do not object to the canvas having a rough look. If then, instead of braying the colour on a stone for God knows how many hours, it was brayed just long enough to make it manageable, without worrying too much about the fineness of the powder, you would get fresher colours which would perhaps darken less. If he wants to make a trial of it with the three chromes, the malachite, the vermilion, the orange lead, the cobalt, and the ultramarine, I am almost certain that at much less cost I should get colours which would be fresher and more lasting. Then what would the price be? I'm sure this could be done. Probably also with the reds and the emerald, which are transparent.

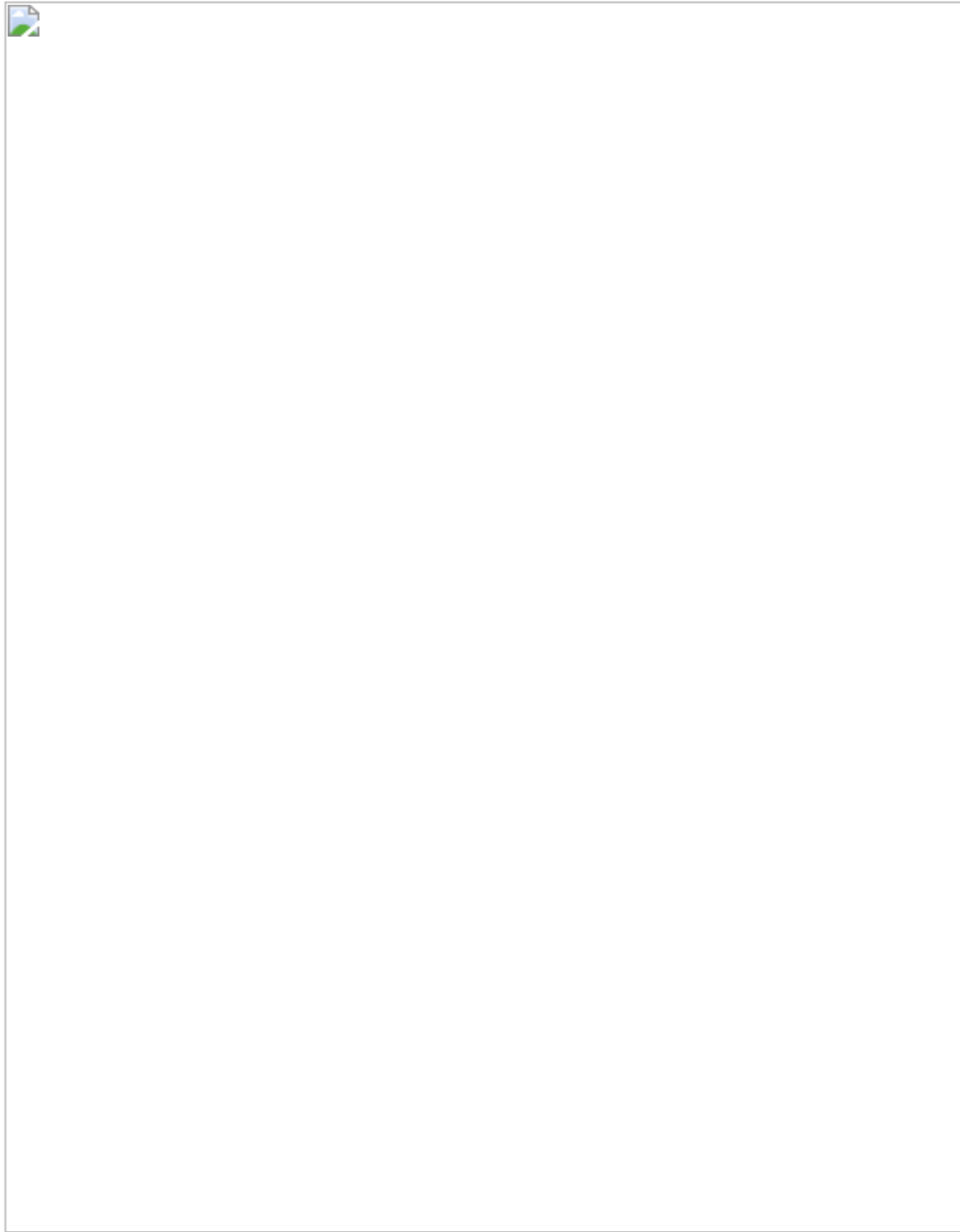
I enclose an order which is urgent.

I am now on the fourth picture of sunflowers. This fourth one is a bunch of 14 flowers, against a yellow background, like a still life of quinces and lemons that I did some time ago.

Only as it is much bigger, it gives a rather singular effect, and I think that this one is painted with more simplicity than the quinces and lemons. Do you remember that one day we saw a very extraordinary Manet at the Hotel Drouot, some huge pink peonies with their green leaves against a light background? As free in the open air and as much a flower as anything could be, and yet painted in a perfectly solid impasto, and not the way Jeannin does it.



189. *Portrait of a Peasant (Patience Escalier)*,  
Arles, 8-10 August, 1888. Oil on canvas,  
64 x 54 cm. Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena.



190. *Portrait of Patience Escalier*,  
Arles, August 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 69 x 56 cm.  
Collection of Stavros S. Niarchos, London.

That's what I'd call simplicity of technique. And I must tell you that nowadays I am trying to find a special brushwork without stippling or anything else, nothing but the varied stroke. But someday you'll see.

What a pity painting costs so much! This week I had fewer worries than other weeks, so I let myself go. I shall have spent the 100-fr. note in a single week, but at the end of this week I'll have my four pictures, and even if I add the cost of all the paint I have used, the week will not have been sheer waste. I have got up very early every day, I have had a good dinner and supper, and so I have been able to work hard and long without feeling myself weaken. But there, we live in days when there is no demand for what we are making, not only does it not sell, but as you see in Gauguin's case, when you want to borrow on the pictures, you can't get anything, even if it is a trifling sum and the work, important. And that is why we are the prey of every happening. And I am afraid that it will hardly change in our lifetime. But if we are preparing richer lives for the painters who will follow in our footsteps, it will be something.

But life is short, and shorter still, the number of years you feel bold enough to face everything.

And in the end it is to be feared that as soon as the new painting is appreciated, the painters will go soft.

But anyway, this much is positive, it is not we of the present time who are decadent. Gauguin and Bernard talk now of "painting like children" - I would rather have that than "painting like decadents." How is it that people see something decadent in impressionism? It is very much the reverse. I enclose a line for Tasset.

The difference in price ought to be considerable, and needless to say, I hope to make less and less use of the finely brayed colours.

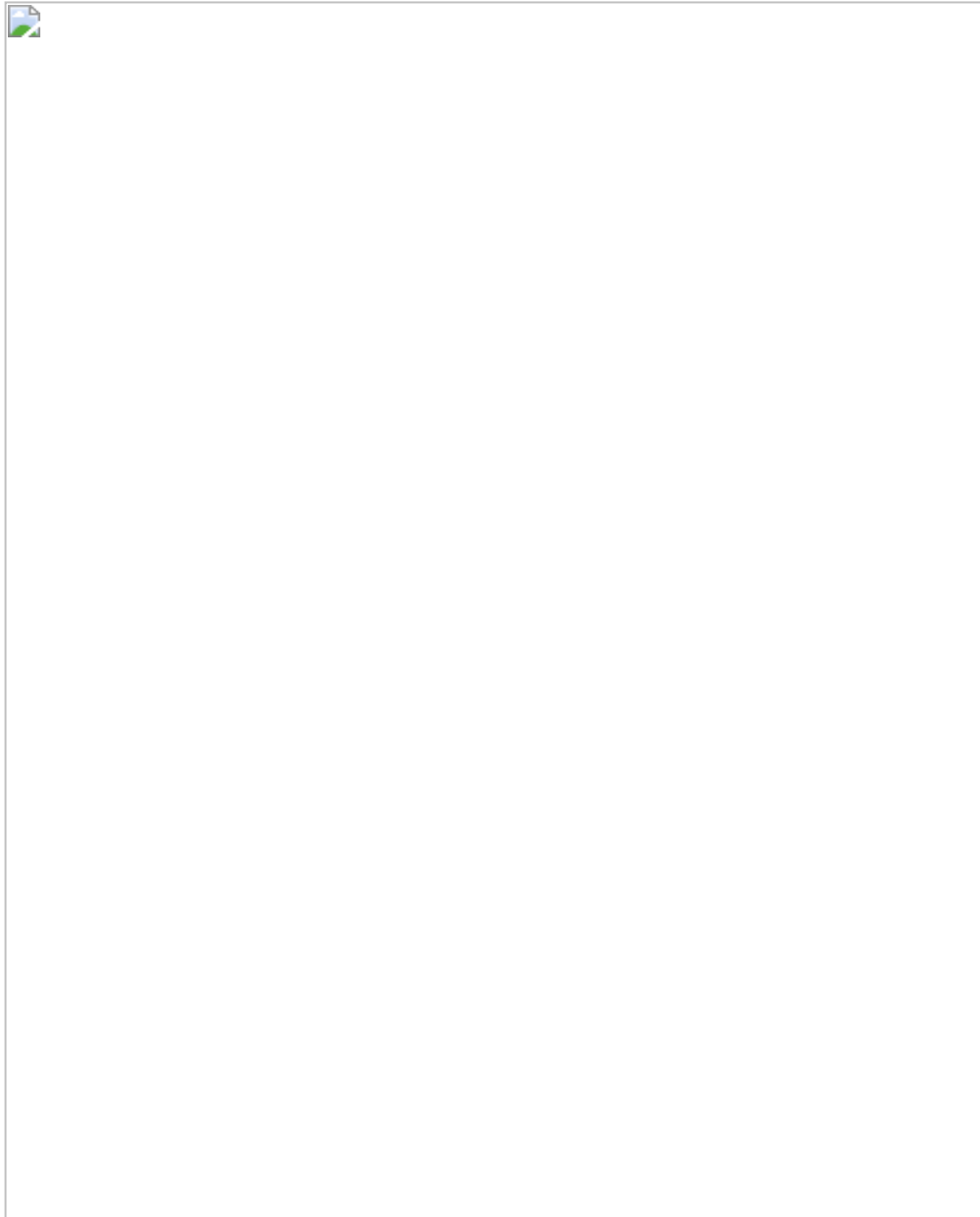
With a handshake.

One of the decorations of sunflowers on royal blue ground has a "halo," that is to say each object is surrounded by a glow of the complementary colour of the background against which it stands out. Goodbye for now.

Ever yours, Vincent



191. *An Old Woman from Arles*,  
Arles, February 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 58 x 42.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



192. *L'Arlésienne (Madame Ginoux with Books)*,  
Arles, 1888-1889.  
Oil on canvas, 91.4 x 73.7 cm.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, c. 17 September 1888**

My dear Theo,

I wrote to you already, early this morning, then I went away to go on with a picture of a garden in the sunshine. Then I brought it back and went out again with a blank canvas, and that also is finished. And now I want to write you again.

Because I have never had such a chance, nature here being so extraordinarily beautiful. Everywhere and all over the vault of heaven is a marvellous blue, and the sun sheds a radiance of pale sulphur, and it is soft and as lovely as the combination of heavenly blues and yellows in a Van der Meer of Delft.

I cannot paint it as beautifully as that, but it absorbs me so much that I let myself go, never thinking of a single rule.

That makes three pictures of the gardens opposite the house. Then the two cafés, and then the sunflowers. Then the portrait of Bock and of myself.

Then the red sun over the factory [Painting lost], and the men unloading sand, and the old mill. Not to mention the other studies, you see that I have got some work behind me. But my paints, my canvas and my purse are all completely exhausted today. The last picture [i.e. F 471], done with the last tubes of paint on the last canvas, of a garden, green of course, is painted without green, nothing but Prussian blue and chrome yellow.

I am beginning to feel that I am quite a different creature from what I was when I came here. I have no doubts, no hesitation in attacking things, and this may increase. But what a country! I am in a public garden, quite close to the street of the kind girls, and Mourier for instance hardly ever went there, although we took a walk in the gardens, practically every day - but on the other side (there are three). But you realise, it is just this that gives a touch of Boccaccio to the place.

But this side of the garden is also, for the same reason of chastity or morality, destitute of any flowering bushes such as the oleanders. There are ordinary plane trees, pines in stiff clumps, a weeping tree, and the green grass. But it is all so intimate. Manet has gardens like this.

As long as you can manage to bear the burden of all this paint and canvas and all the money that I spend, keep on sending it. Because the stuff I am

getting ready will be better than the last batch, and I think we shall make something on it instead of losing. If only I can manage to do a coherent whole. That is what I am trying to do.

But is it quite out of the question that Thomas would lend me 200 or 300 francs on my studies? That would let me make a profit of a thousand on it, for I cannot tell you often enough, I am ravished, ravished with what I see.

Today while I was working I thought a lot about Bernard. His letter is steeped in admiration for Gauguin's talent. He says that he thinks him so great an artist that he is almost afraid, and that he finds everything that he does himself poor in comparison with Gauguin.

And you know that last winter Bernard was always picking quarrels with Gauguin. However this may be, and whatever happens, it is very comforting that these artists are our friends, and I dare say they will remain so, however the business turns out. I am so happy in the house and in my work that I even dare to think that this happiness will not always be limited to one, but that you will have a share in it and good luck to go with it.

Some time ago I read an article on Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Giotto and Botticelli. Good Lord! It did make an impression on me reading the letters of those men.

And Petrarch lived quite near here in Avignon, and I am seeing the same cypresses and oleanders.

I have tried to put something of that into one of the pictures painted in a very thick impasto, citron yellow and lime green. Giotto moved me most - always in pain, and always full of kindness and enthusiasm, as though he were already living in a different world from ours.

And besides, Giotto is extraordinary. I understand him better than the poets Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. I always think that poetry is more terrible than painting, though painting is a dirtier and a much more worrying job. And then the painter never says anything, he holds his tongue, and I like that too.

My dear Theo, when you have seen the cypresses and the oleanders here, and the sun - and the day will come, you may be sure - then you will think even more often of the beautiful "Doux pays" by Puvis de Chavannes, and many other pictures of his.

There is still a great deal of Greece all through the Tartarin and Daumier part of this queer country, where the good folk have the accent you know;

there is a Venus of Arles just as there is a Venus of Lesbos, and one still feels the youth of it in spite of all.

I haven't the slightest doubt that someday you too will know the South. Perhaps you will go to see Claude Monet when he is at Antibes, or anyway you will find some opportunity.

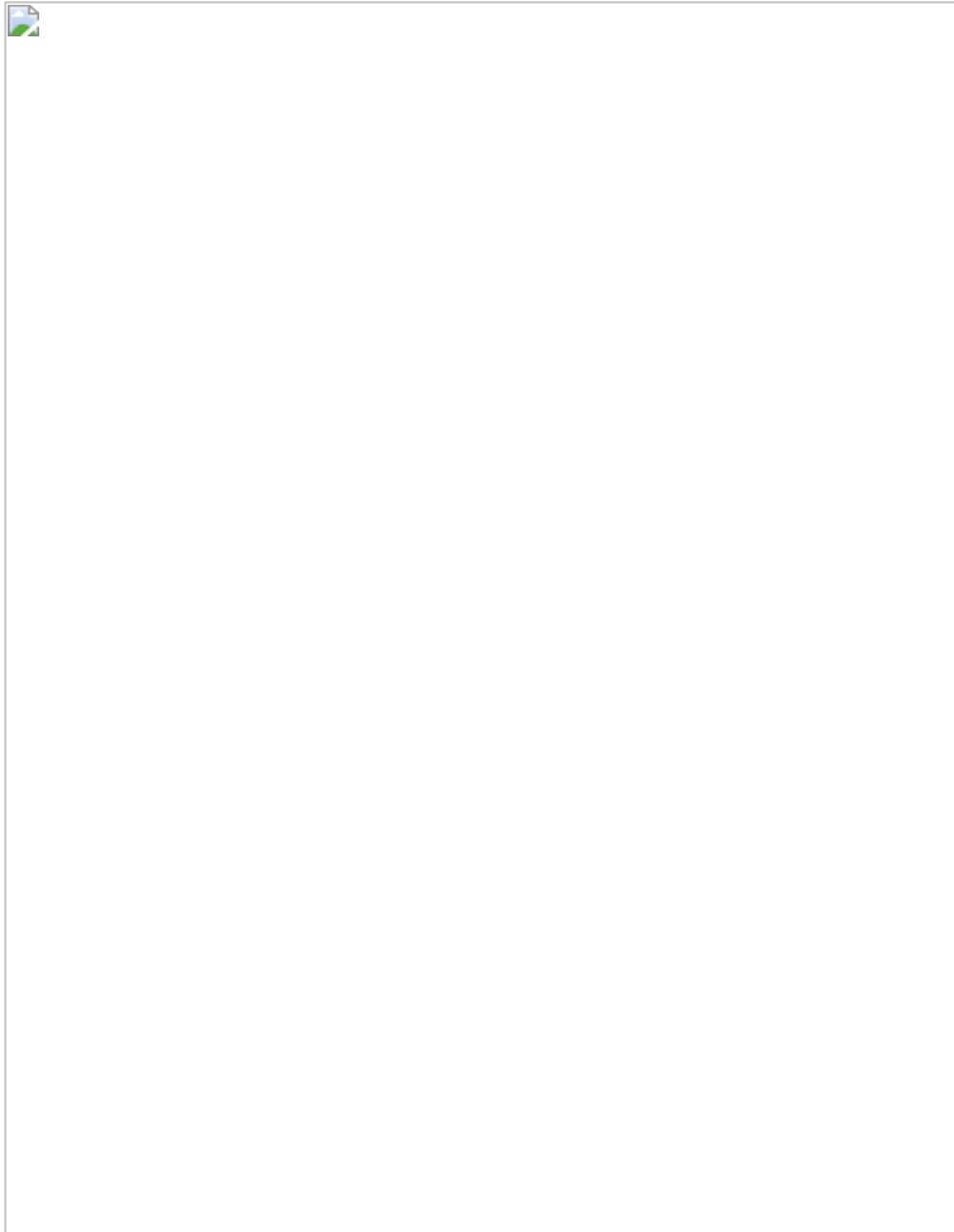
When we have mistral down here, however, it is the exact opposite of a sweet country, for the mistral sets one on edge. But what compensations, what compensations when there is a day without wind - what intensity of colour, what pure air, what vibrant serenity.

Tomorrow I am going to draw, until the paints come. But I have deliberately arrived at the point where I will not draw a picture with charcoal. That's no use, you must attack drawing with the colour itself in order to draw well.

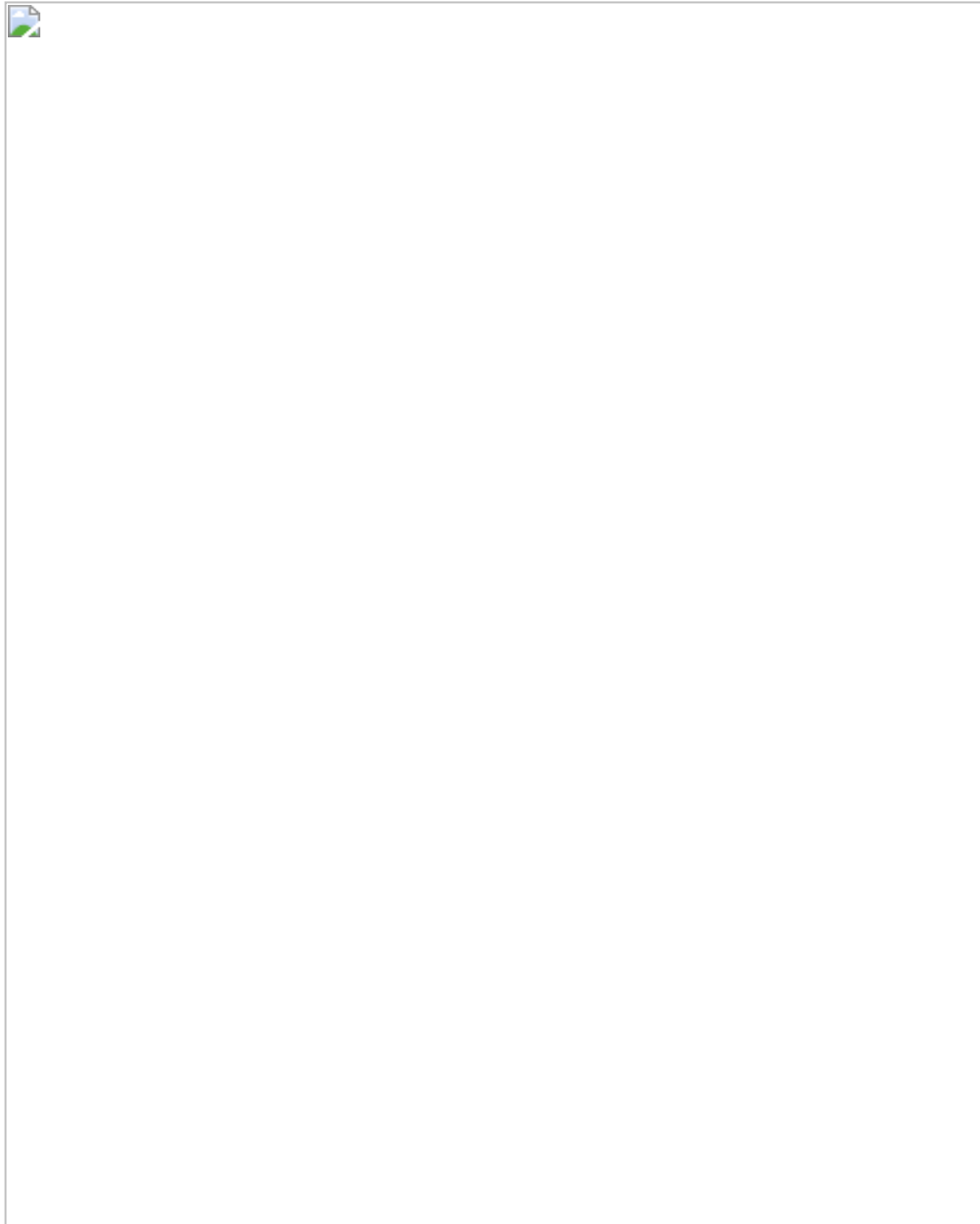
Oh - the exhibition at the Revue Indépendante - good, but once and for all, we are too good smokers to put the wrong end of the cigar into our mouths. We shall be forced to try to sell in order to do the things we sell over again, and better. That's because we are in a bad trade, but let's try something different from the fun of the fair that's the pest of the house.



193. *Still Life with a Coffeepot, Crockery and Fruit*,  
Arles, May 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 81 cm.  
Collection of Basil P. and Elise Goulandris, Andros.



194. *Van Gogh's Chair*,  
Arles, December 1888. Oil on canvas,  
91.8 x 73 cm. The National Gallery, London.



195. *Gauguin's Chair*,  
Arles, December 1888. Oil on canvas,  
90.5 x 72.5 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





196. *Café at Night*,  
Arles, September 1888. Watercolour,  
44 x 63 cm. Private Collection, Bern.

This afternoon I had a select public - four or five hooligans and a dozen street Arabs, who were especially interested in seeing the paint come out of the tubes.

Well, that same public - it meant fame, or rather I mean to laugh at ambition and fame, as I do at those street Arabs, and at the loafers on the banks of the Rhône and in the Rue du Pont d'Arles.

Yesterday I was at Milliet's; he is coming tomorrow, having stayed on for four days. I wish Bernard would go and do his military service in Africa, because he would do some fine things there, and I do not know what to say to him yet. He said he would exchange his portrait for one of my studies. But he says he dare not do Gauguin as I asked him, because he feels afraid in front of Gauguin. Basically Bernard has such a temperament! He is sometimes foolish and vicious, but I certainly have no right to reproach him with that, because I myself know the same disorder of the nerves only too well, and I know that he will not reproach me either. If he went to Africa to join Milliet, Milliet would certainly receive him kindly, because Milliet is a very faithful friend, and makes love so easily that he comes near to despising love itself.

What is Seurat doing? I should not dare to show him the studies already sent, but the ones of the sunflowers, and the cabarets, and the gardens, I would like him to see those. I often think of his method, though I do not follow it at all; but he is an original colourist, and Signac too, though to a different degree, their stippling is a new discovery, and at all events I like them very much. But I myself - I tell you frankly - am returning more to what I was looking for before I came to Paris. I do not know if anyone before me has talked about suggestive colour, but Delacroix and Monticelli, without talking about it, did it.

But I have got back to where I was in Nuenen, when I made a vain attempt to learn music, so much did I already feel the relation between our colour and Wagner's music.

It is true that in impressionism I see the resurrection of Eugène Delacroix, but the interpretations of it are so divergent and in a way so irreconcilable that it will not be impressionism which will give us the final doctrine.

That is why I myself remain among the impressionists, because it professes nothing, and binds you to nothing, and as one of the comrades I need not declare my formula.

Good Lord, how you have to mess about in life. I only ask for time to study, and do you yourself really ask for anything but that? But I think that you also, like me, must long to have the quiet necessary to study without prejudice.

And I am so afraid of taking it away from you by my demands for money.

However, I make such careful calculations, and again today I found that for the ten metres of canvas I had calculated all the colours except one, the fundamental yellow. If all my colours are used up at the same time, doesn't it prove that I know the relative proportions in my sleep? It is the same with drawing, I hardly measure at all, and in that I am definitely opposed to Cormon, who says that if he did not measure, he would draw like a pig. All the same I think you did well to buy so many stretchers, because we must have a certain number to be able to dry the canvases, it preserves them, and I myself have a batch of them here as well. But don't let them get in your way by leaving them on the stretchers, you mustn't let the lot take up too much room.

Here I pay 4.50 francs for size 30, 25 and 20 stretchers, and 1 franc for size 15, 12 and 10 if I get them made by the carpenter. Carpentering is very expensive here. Tanguy should be able to make and deliver them at that price.

I am trying to get a frame for the square size 30 canvas in light walnut at 5 francs, and I think I shall get it. The heavy oak frame for the portrait, size 10 canvas, is costing me 5 francs also.

I have again had to order five size 30 stretchers for the new canvas; they have already been made, and I must go and get them. This will show you that I cannot get on without some money at this stage of the work. It is a comfort that all the time we are dealing in the raw material, and not speculating, but only trying to produce. So that we cannot go wrong.

I hope that this will always be so, and if there is the fatal necessity of using up my paint and my canvas and my cash, all the same be very sure it isn't that which will ruin us.

Even if you on your part use up your purse and whatever is inside it, it's not so good, but just tell me quietly, "There's nothing left"; for there will be some more because of what I've done with it. And supposing you say, very rightly - "And meanwhile?" - meanwhile I shall go on drawing, because doing nothing but drawing is easier than painting.

With a good handshake. What days these are, not for what happens in them, but I feel so strongly that both you and I are neither in our decadence nor done for yet, nor shall we ever be.

But you know, I do not contradict the critics who will say that my pictures are not finished. With a handshake, and good-by for the present.

Ever yours, Vincent

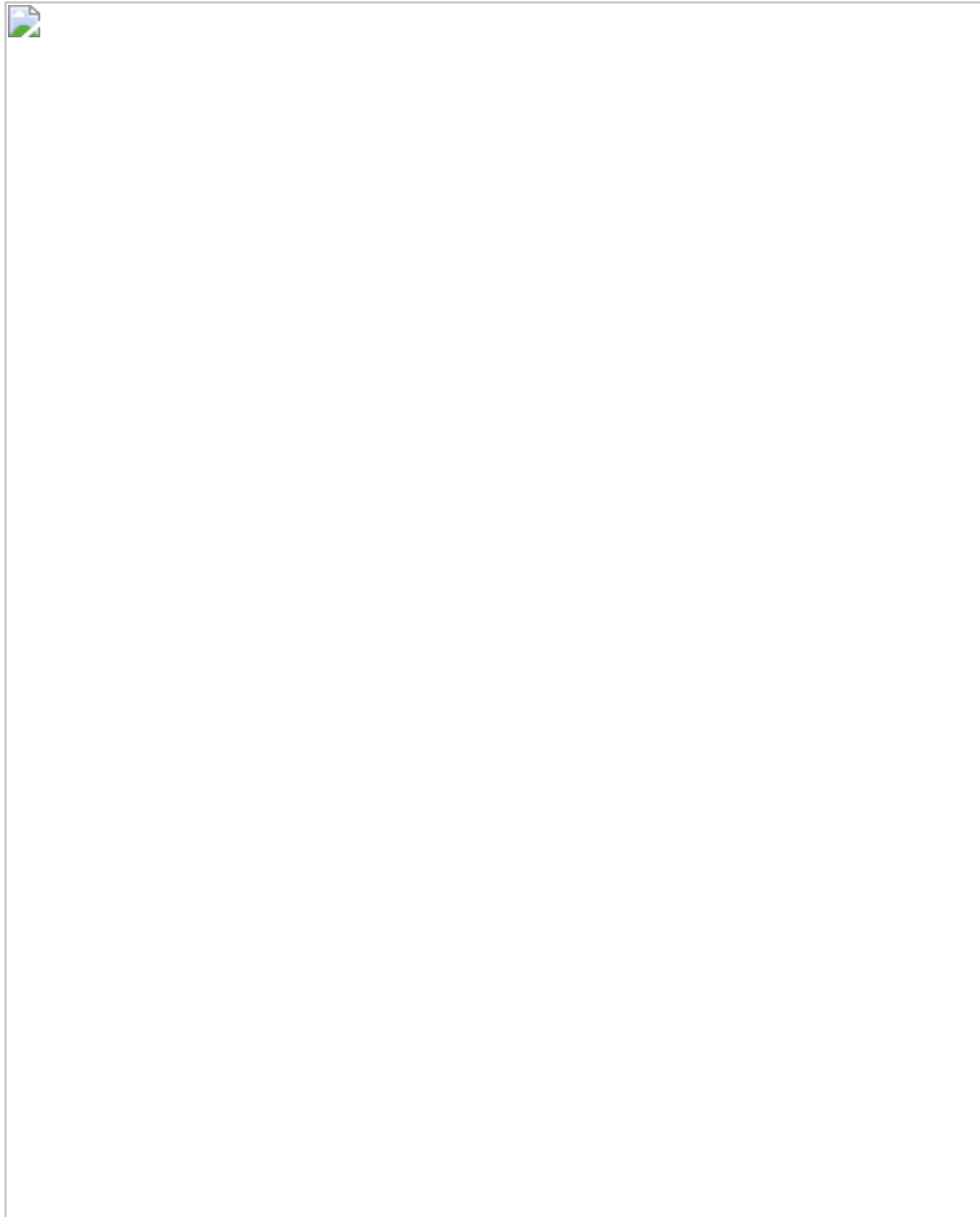


197. *The Yellow House*,  
Arles, September 1888. Oil on canvas,  
72 x 91.5 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



*198. Starry Night over the Rhone,*  
Arles, September 1888. Oil on canvas,  
72.5 x 92 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.





199. *Café Terrace at Night (Place du Forum)*,  
Arles, c. 16 September 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 81 x 65.5 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, c. 6 November 1888**

My dear Theo,

Gauguin and I thank you very much for the 100 francs you sent and also for your letter.

Gauguin is very pleased that you like what he sent from Brittany, and that other people who have seen them like them too.

Just now he has in hand some women in a vineyard, altogether from memory, but if he does not spoil it or leave it unfinished it will be very fine and very unusual. Also a picture of the same night cafe that I painted too. I have done two canvases of falling leaves, which Gauguin liked, I think, and I'm working now on a vineyard all purple and yellow.

Then I have an Arlésienne at last, a figure (size 30 canvas) slashed on in an hour, background pale lemon, the face grey, the clothes black, deep black, with unmixed Prussian blue. She is leaning on a green table and seated in an armchair of orange wood.

Gauguin has bought a chest of drawers for the house, and various household utensils, also 20 metres of very strong canvas, and a lot of things that we needed, and that at any rate it was more convenient to have. Only we have kept an account of all he has paid out, which comes almost to 100 francs, so that either at the New Year or say in March we can pay him back, and then the chest of drawers etc. will naturally be ours. I think this is right on the whole, since he intends to put money by when he sells, till the time (say in a year) when he has enough to risk a second voyage to Martinique.

We are working hard, and our life together goes very well. I am very glad to know that you are not alone in the flat. These drawings by de Haan are very fine. I like them very much. Yet to do that with colour, to manage so much expression without the help of chiaroscuro in black and white, damn it all, it is not easy.

And he will even arrive at a new type of drawing if he carries out his plan of passing through impressionism at a school, considering his new attempts in colour merely as studies. But in my opinion he is right over and over again to do all this.

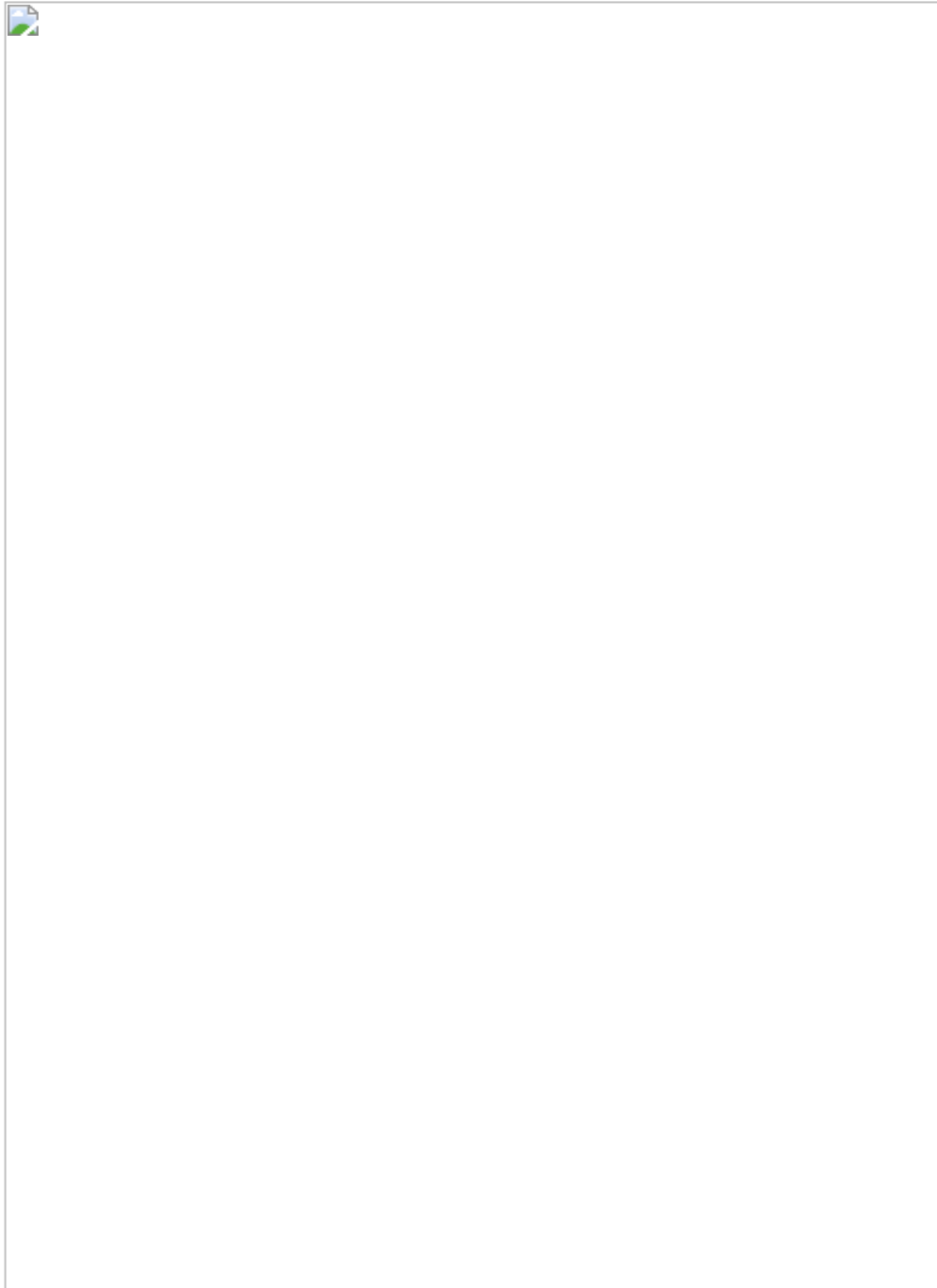
Only there are several so-called impressionists who have not his knowledge of the figure, and it is just this knowledge of the figure which

will later on come again to the surface, and which he will be all the better for.

I am very anxious some day to get to know de Haan and Isaäcson. If they ever came here Gauguin would certainly say to them - go to Java for impressionist work. For Gauguin, though he works hard here, is still homesick for hot countries. And then it is unquestionable that if you went to Java, for instance, with the one idea of working on colour, you would see heaps of new things.



200. *Dance Hall at Arles*,  
Arles, December 1888. Oil on canvas,  
90 x 72 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



201. *Portrait of Eugène Boch*,  
Arles, September 1888. Oil on canvas,  
60 x 45 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Then in those brighter countries, with a stronger sun, direct shadow, as well as the cast shadow of objects and figures, becomes quite different, and is so full of colour that one is tempted simply to suppress it. That happens even here. Yet I will say no more on the importance of painting in the tropics, I am already sure de Haan and Isaäcson will feel the importance of it.

In any case, to come here some time or other would do them no harm, they would certainly find some interesting things.

Gauguin and I are going to have our dinner at home today, and we feel as sure and certain that it will turn out well as that it will seem to us better or cheaper.

So as not to delay this letter I will finish up for today. I hope to write again soon. Your arrangement about money is quite right.

I think you will like the fall of the leaves that I have done.

It is some poplar trunks in lilac cut by the frame where the leaves begin.

These tree trunks are lined like pillars along an avenue where to right and left there are rows of old Roman tombs of a blue lilac. And then the soil is covered, as with a carpet, by a thick layer of yellow and orange fallen leaves. And they are still falling like flakes of snow. And in the avenue little black figures of lovers. The upper part of the picture is a bright green meadow, and no sky or almost none.

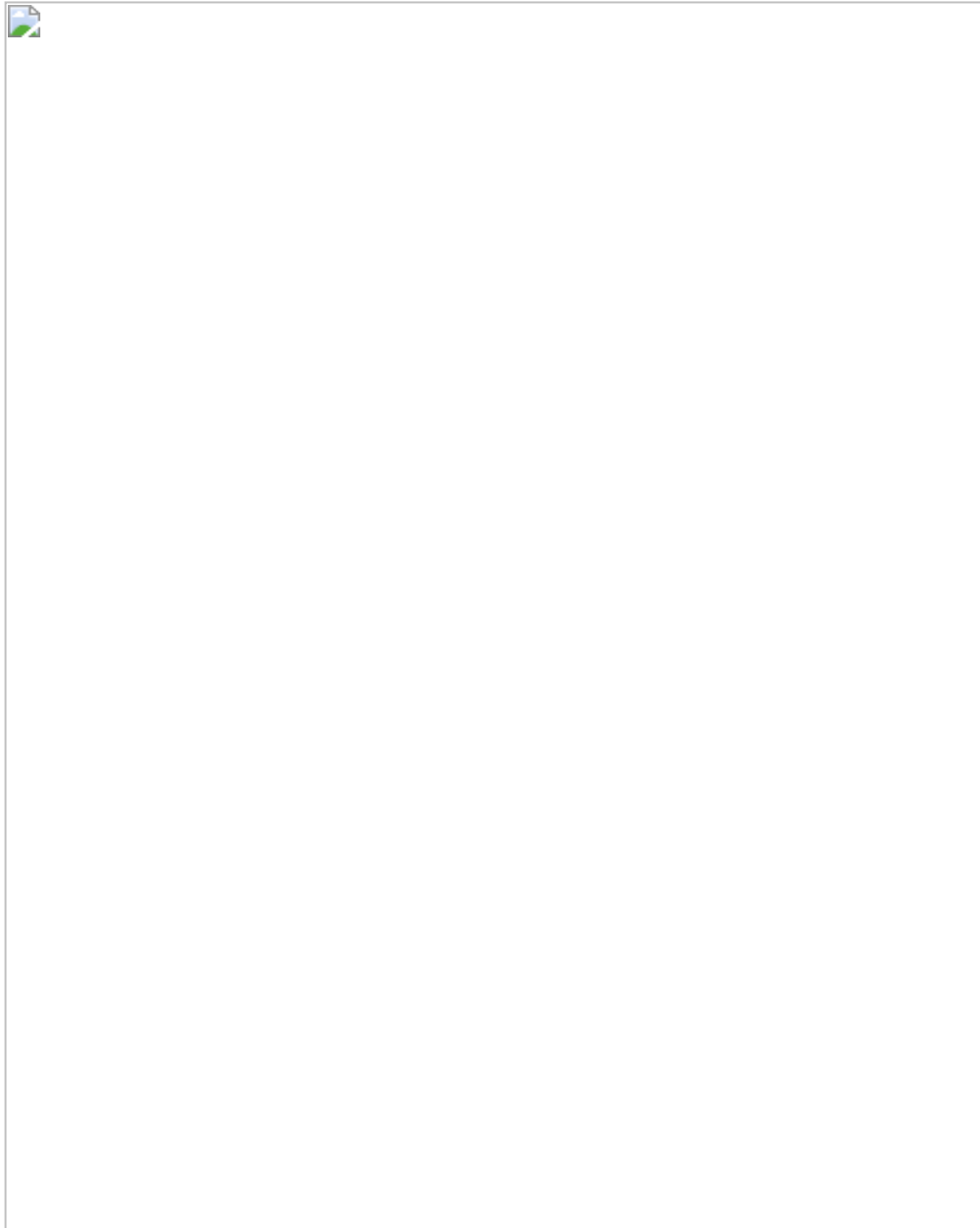
The second canvas is the same avenue but with an old fellow and a woman as fat and round as a ball.

But if only you had been with us on Sunday, when we saw a red vineyard, all red like red wine. In the distance it turned to yellow, and then a green sky with the sun, the earth after the rain violet, sparkling yellow here and there where it caught the reflection of the setting sun.

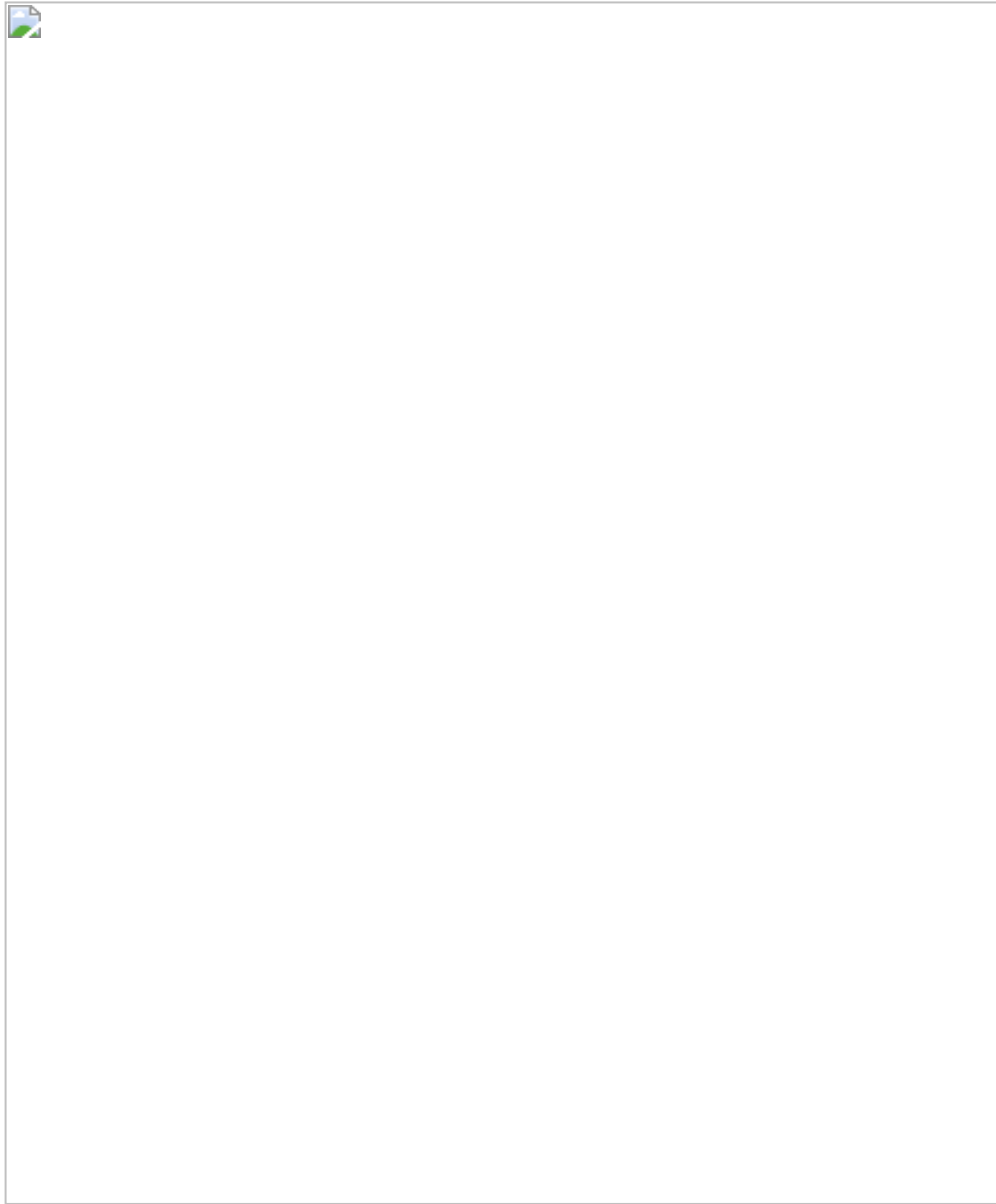
A handshake in thought from both of us, good bye for the present. I will write again as soon as I can, and to our Dutchmen too. [The two artists staying with Theo.]

Ever yours, Vincent

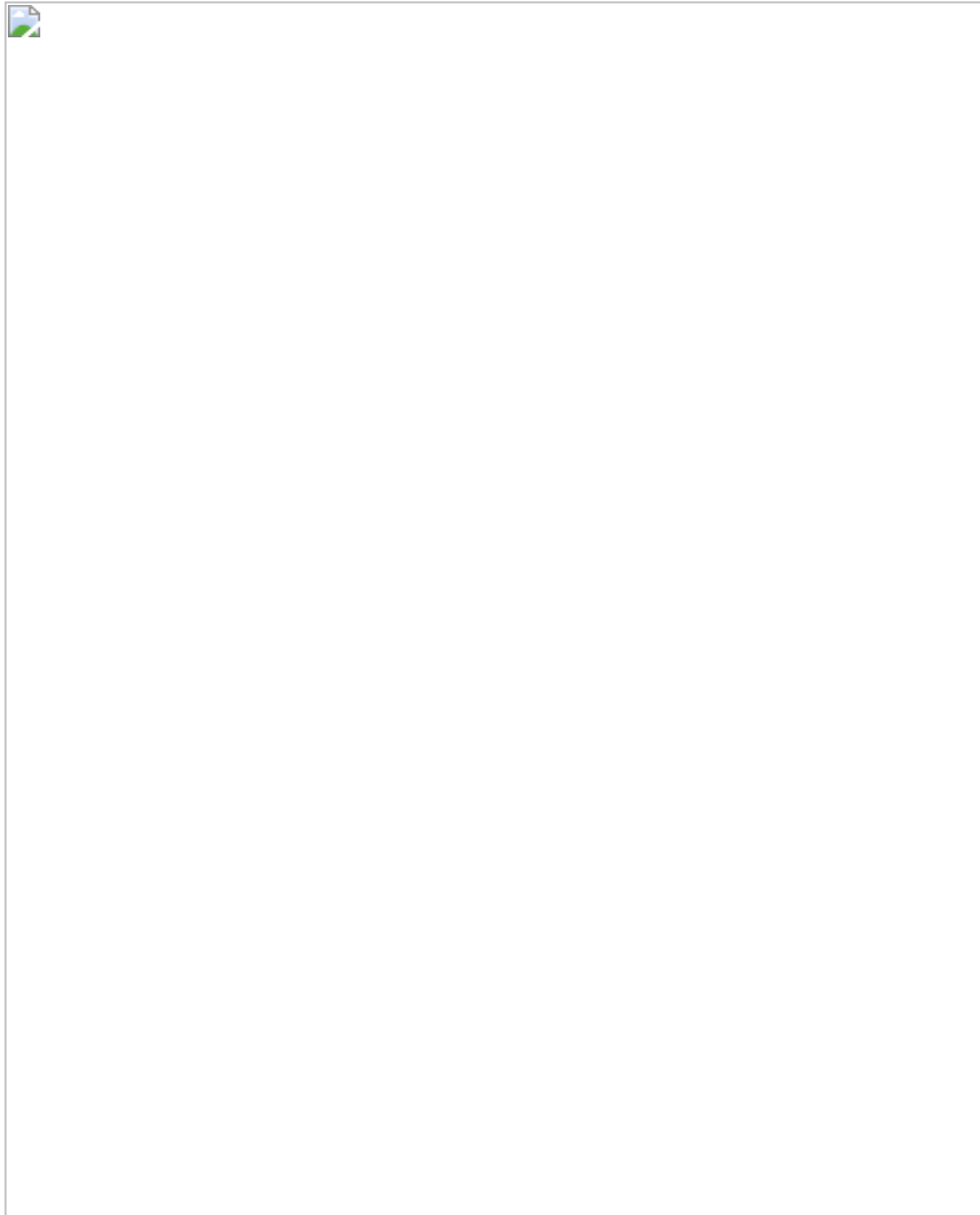




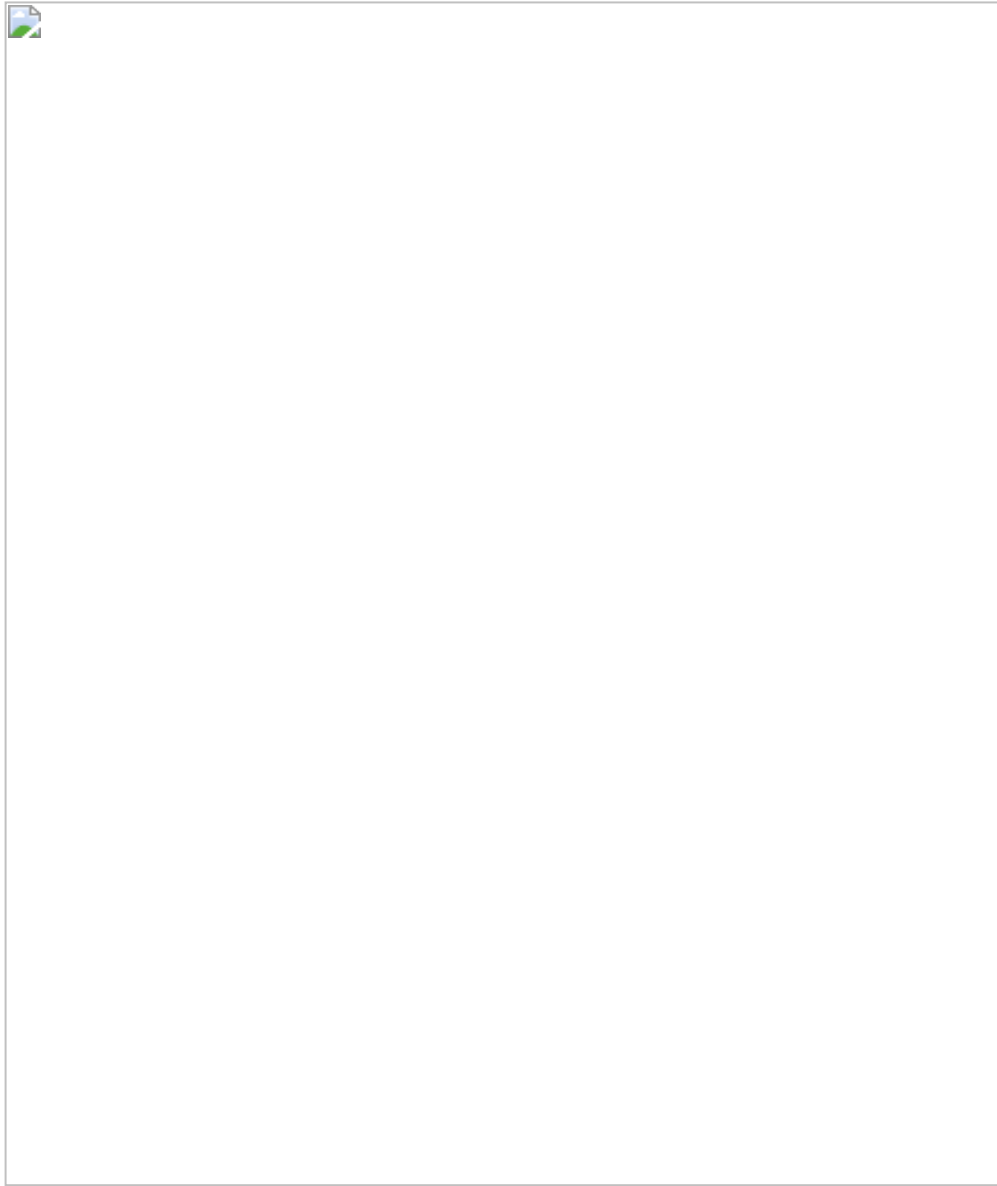
202. *The Lover (Portrait of Lieutenant Milliet)*,  
Arles, late September-early October 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 49 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



203. *The Zouave*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
65 x 54 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



204. *The Zouave*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
81 x 65 cm. Private Collection.



205. *The Schoolboy (Camille Roulin)*,  
Arles, November-December 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 63.5 x 54 cm.  
Museu de arte de São Paulo  
Assis Chateaubriand, São Paulo.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, 23 December 1888**

My dear Theo,

Thank you very much for your letter, for the 100 Fr. note enclosed and also for the 50 Fr. money order.

I think myself that Gauguin was a little out of sorts with the good town of Arles, the little yellow house where we work, and especially with me. [Gauguin had written to Theo that Vincent and he could not go on living together “in consequence of incompatibility of temper.” The quarrel was made up, and Gauguin wrote another letter, speaking of the first as a bad dream.]

As a matter of fact there are bound to be for him as for me further grave difficulties to overcome here.

But these difficulties are rather within ourselves than outside.

Altogether I think that either he will definitely go, or else definitely stay.

Before doing anything I told him to think it over and reckon things up again.

Gauguin is very powerful, strongly creative, but just because of that he must have peace.

Will he find it anywhere if he does not find it here?

I am waiting for him to make a decision with absolute serenity.

A good handshake,

Vincent

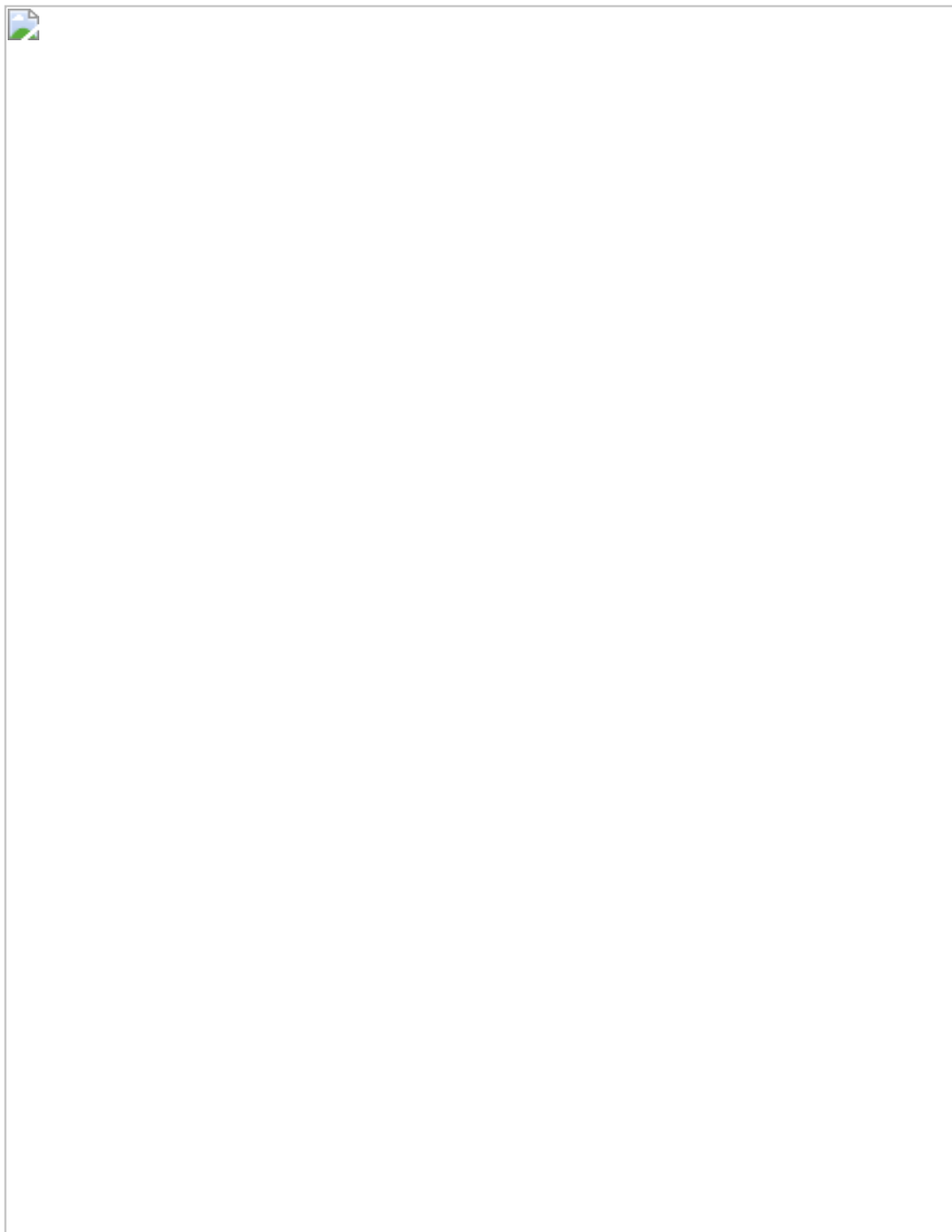
[On the following day, December 24th, a telegram arrived from Gauguin that called Theo to Arles. Vincent, in a state of terrible excitement and in a high fever, had cut off a piece of his own ear and taken it as a present to a woman in a brothel.

There had been a violent scene; Roulin the postman managed to get him home, but the police intervened, found Vincent bleeding and unconscious in bed, and sent him to the hospital. Theo found him there, “poor fighter and poor, poor sufferer,” and stayed over Christmas. Gauguin went back with Theo to Paris. By December 31st the news was better, and on January 1st Vincent wrote Letter 566 in pencil.]

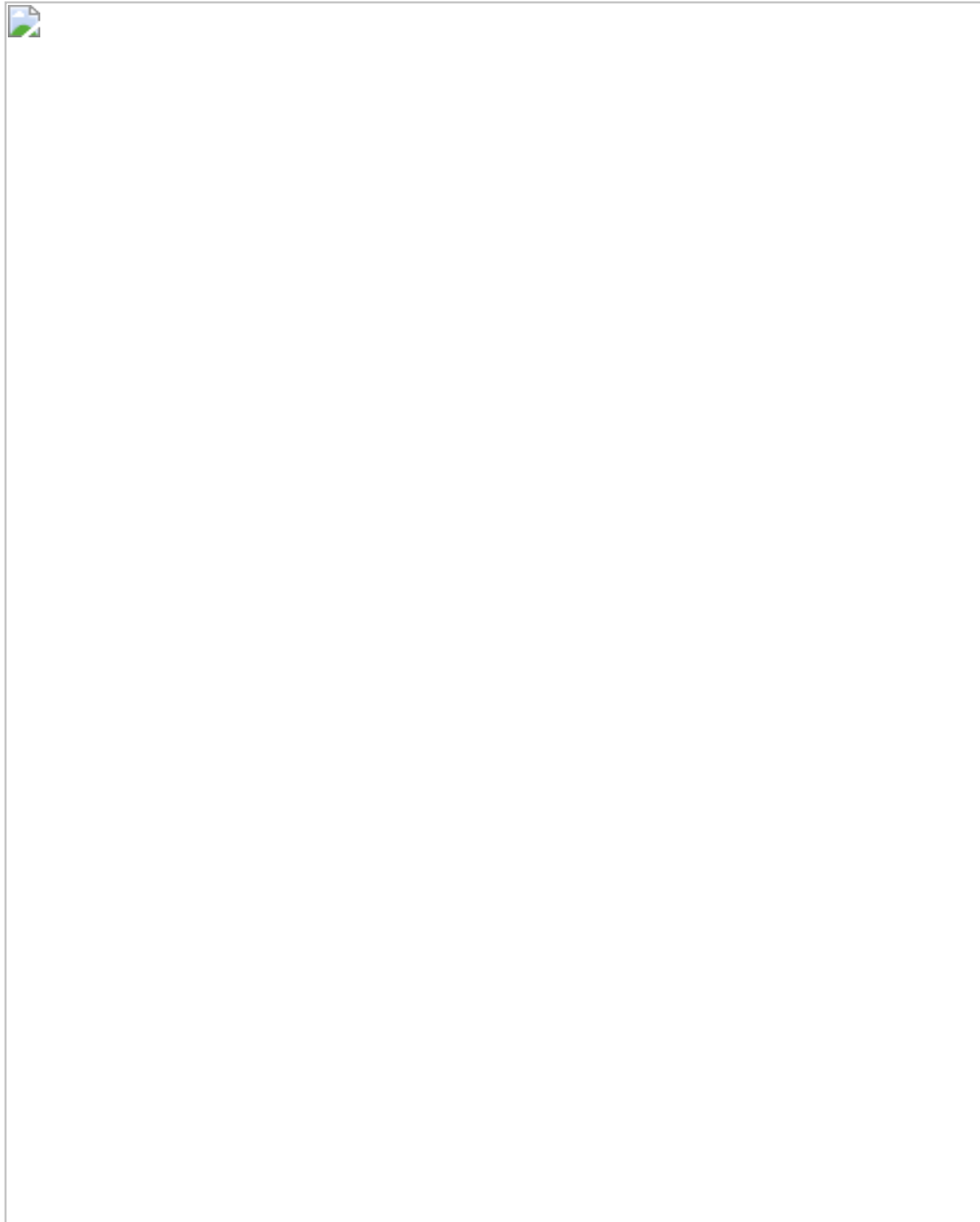
[N.B. Some of the above note by Jo van Gogh-Bonger is doubtful. Roulin would not have left his friend bleeding; most probably Vincent found his

own way home. The police only arrived the next morning, which is inexplicable, considering that Vincent was well-known both at the brothel and by the gendarmes, whose station was just across the road from his house.]

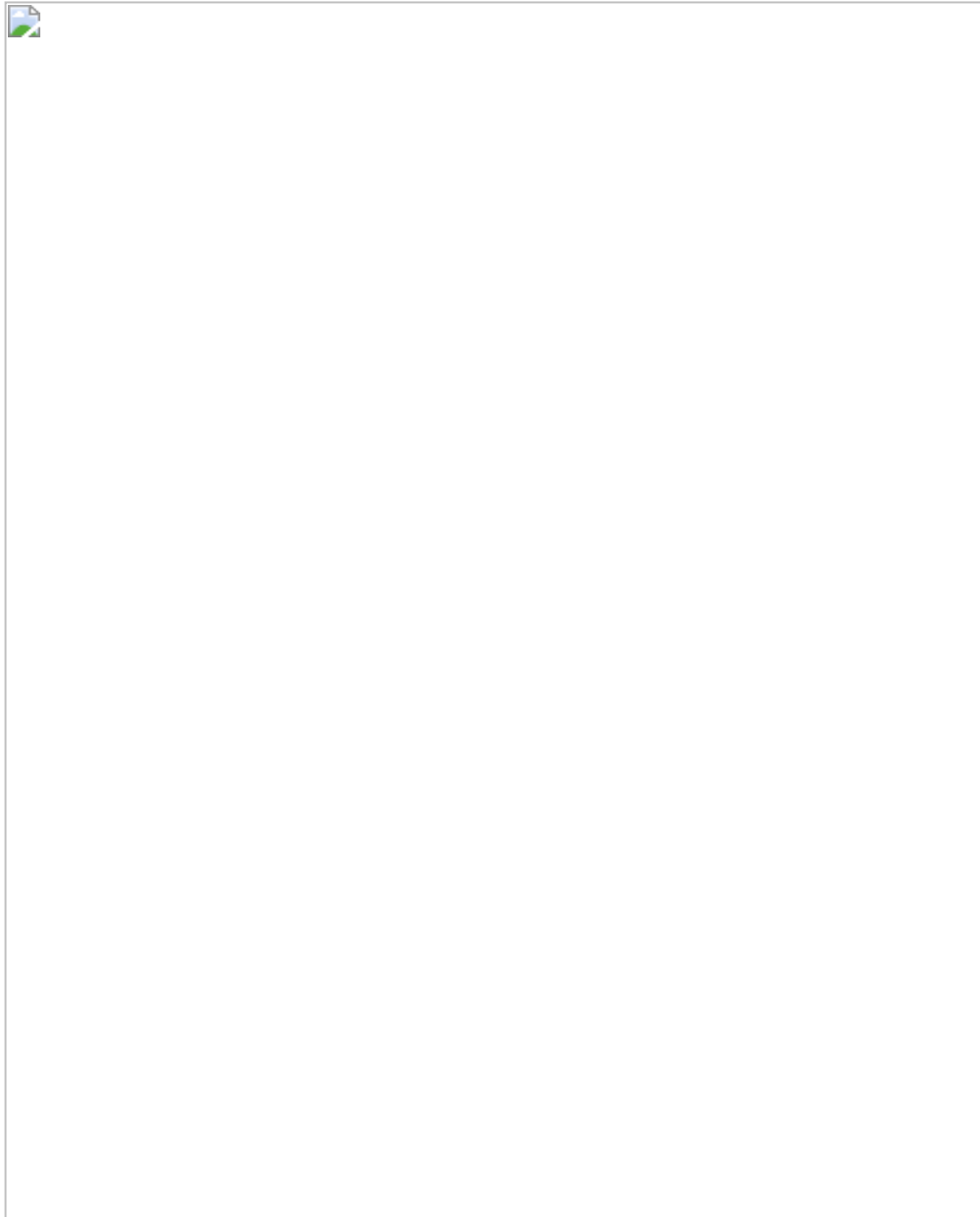




206. *La Mousmé*,  
Arles, July 1888. Pen,  
pencil and reed pen, 32.5 x 24.5 cm.  
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.



207. *La Mousmé*,  
Arles, July 1888. Oil on canvas,  
73.3 x 60.3 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



208. *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear*,  
Arles, January 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 50 cm.  
The Courtauld Gallery, London.

Arles: 1889

***“I was a fool and  
everything I did was wrong”***

On January 7th, fourteen days after his self-mutilation, van Gogh left the hospital. Joseph Roulin and his wife began to look after him. He wrote to Theo:

“I am going to set to work again tomorrow. I shall begin by doing one or two still lifes so as to get back into the habit of painting.”[\[96\]](#)

In the first letters after his return to the Yellow House, van Gogh makes no mention of the nature of his illness:

“I hope I have just had simply an artist’s fit, and then a lot of fever after very considerable loss of blood, as an artery was severed; but my appetite came back at once, my digestion is all right and my blood recovers from day to day, and in the same way serenity returns to my brain day by day. So please quite deliberately forget your unhappy journey and my illness.”[\[97\]](#)

Writing and painting, van Gogh hoped to recover and to forget. He painted a portrait of his physician, Dr. Rey. Still, he clung to his belief in the future of the artists’ house. He wrote to Gauguin, who answered immediately. The first page of this letter is missing; in the second part, Gauguin advises his friend how to restore a painting: “The ‘vintage’ is totally flaked, because the White peeled off. I have glued everything with a method recommended. I tell you about it, because I think that it is easy to do and will help you to retouch your pictures.”[\[98\]](#) As if nothing had happened, Gauguin resumed his habitual role as the teacher. The letter van Gogh sent one week later to Theo can be read like an indirect answer to Gauguin:

“Look here, I won’t say more about the absurdity of this measure. Suppose that I was as wild as anything, then why wasn’t our illustrious partner more collected?... How can Gauguin pretend that he was afraid of upsetting me by his presence when he can hardly deny that he knew I kept asking for him continually... One good quality he has is the marvelous way he can apportion expenses from day to day. While I am often absent-minded, preoccupied with aiming at the goal, he has far more money sense for each separate day than I have. But his weakness is that by a sudden freak or animal impulse he upsets everything he has arranged. Now do you stay at your post once you have taken it, or do you desert it? I do not judge anyone in this, hoping not to be condemned myself in cases when my strength might fail me, but if Gauguin has so much real virtue, and such capacity, how is he going to employ himself?”[\[99\]](#)

In spite of his deep disappointment over Gauguin’s flight from Arles, van Gogh wrote to him to propose that they again try to establish an artists’ community, this time in Brittany. In his reply, Gauguin evaded the suggestion. Van Gogh sought to maintain a positive outlook, but the hopefulness

he felt when he was waiting for Gauguin in Arles continued to elude him. His world was in turmoil; nothing was clear. During this period, van Gogh worked on a painting he had already begun in December: a portrait of Augustine Roulin, the wife of the postman, that he called *La Berceuse*. He describes the picture to Theo:

“I think I have already told you that... I have a canvas of La Berceuse the very one I was working on when my illness interrupted me... I have just said to Gauguin about this picture that when he and I were talking about the fishermen of Iceland and of their mournful isolation... the idea came to me to paint a picture in such a way that sailors, who are at once children and martyrs, seeing it in the cabin of their Icelandic fishing boat, would feel the old sense of being rocked come over them and remember their own lullabies.”[\[100\]](#)

The picture painted to comfort others became a consolation for himself. He wrote to Gauguin:

“My dear friend, to achieve in painting what the music of Berlioz and Wagner has already done... an art that offers consolation for the broken-hearted!”[\[101\]](#)

At the end of January, Joseph Roulin had to move to Marseille. On February 3rd, van Gogh informed his brother:

“I am feeling very well, and I shall do everything the doctor says, but... when I came out of the hospital with kind old Roulin, who had come to get me, I thought that there had been nothing wrong with me, but afterward I felt that I had been ill.”[\[102\]](#)

For the first time van Gogh spoke about the possibility that he could again have an attack and he promised his doctor in Arles, Dr. Rey, “that at the slightest grave symptom I would come back and put myself under the treatment of the mental specialists in Aix, or under his.”[\[103\]](#) A few days later, van Gogh was back in the hospital, but not of his own free will. On February 7th, Reverend Salles, the Protestant clergyman, informed Theo:

“Your brother... had again shown symptoms of mental derangement. For three days, he believes he sees everywhere people who poison and people who are poisoned. The charwoman... in view of his abnormal state, took it for her duty to report the affair; the neighbours informed the superintendent. He gave the order to watch your brother and admit him into the hospital... What shall be done now?”[\[104\]](#)

In the following weeks, Salles would pose this question several times – but Theo’s instructions remained vague. Van Gogh returned to the Yellow House, but only for a short while – “the neighbours, who had grown afraid of him, petitioned the mayor, complaining that it was dangerous to leave him at liberty.”[\[105\]](#) On March 19th, van Gogh described the events:

“I write to you in full possession of my faculties and not as a madman, but as the brother you know. This is the truth. A certain number of people here (there were more than 80 signatures) addressed a petition to the Mayor..., describing me as a man not fit to be at liberty, or something like that...”

Anyhow, here I am, shut up in a cell all the livelong day, under lock and key and with keepers, without my guilt being proven or even open to proof.”[\[106\]](#)





209. *Public Garden with Couple and  
Blue Fir Tree: The Poet's Garden III*,  
Arles, October 1888. Oil on canvas,  
73 x 92 cm. Private Collection, St. Petersburg.



210. *The Plain of La Crau with an Orchard*,  
Arles, April 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 65.5 x 81.5 cm.  
The Courtauld Gallery, London.



211. *View of Arles*,  
Arles, April 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 72 x 92 cm.  
Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

Van Gogh saw himself as wrongly convicted, not ill. On several previous occasions, he had learned that deviation from social conventions is often punished with exclusion. After van Gogh's failure as a preacher, his father had threatened to admit him to the mental hospital in Gheel.<sup>[107]</sup> Tersteel, the manager of Goupil's gallery in The Hague considered him to be of "unsound mind and temperament"<sup>[108]</sup> when he learned that the painter was living with a prostitute. During one visit he gave van Gogh a homily: "He was hasty in everything; he was sure of just one thing: I was a fool and everything I did was wrong."<sup>[109]</sup> In his letters, van Gogh uses madness and illness quite often as a metaphor for the state of society:

"Then the doctors will tell us that not only Moses, Mahomet, Christ, Luther, Bunyan and others were mad, but Frans Hals, Rembrandt, Delacroix, too, and also all the dear narrow-minded old women like our mother. Ah – that's a serious matter – one might ask these doctors: Where then are the sane people? Are they the brothel bouncers who are always right? Probably. Then what to choose? Fortunately there is no choice."<sup>[110]</sup>

Since he had no choice, van Gogh took the place assigned to him by the citizens of Arles:

"Am I to suffer imprisonment or the madhouse? Why not? Didn't Rochefort and Hugo, Quinet and others give an eternal example by submitting to exile, and the first even to a convict prison? But all I want to say is that this is a thing above the mere question of illness and health.... And that is what the first and last cause of my aberration was. Do you know those words of a Dutch poet – 'Ik ben aan d'aard gehecht met meer dan aardse banden' (I am attached to the earth by more than earthly ties). That is what I have experienced in the midst of much suffering – above all – in my so-called mental illness."<sup>[111]</sup>

Van Gogh understood, from the beginning, the social side of his 'madness.' In time, he learned to accept that he was ill and that he needed help. But he didn't want to be punished: "If – say – I should become definitely insane – I certainly say that this is impossible – in any case I must be treated differently, and given fresh air, and my work, etc."<sup>[112]</sup>

The mental hospital in Saint-Rémy, suggested by Pastor Salles, seemed to offer this treatment. Van Gogh also had other reasons to consent to going there: he had nowhere else to go. The owner of the Yellow House had cut off their contract; Gauguin refused to join him in Brittany; and his place in Theo's flat was now occupied by the bride. He was afraid that he would again have to live in hotels: "I must have my own fixed niche."<sup>[113]</sup> The mental hospital became a shelter, a substitute for a home, a nest.

**Letter from Reverend Salles to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, 26 February 1889**

Mister,

Your poor brother has been taken into the hospital again. As you will undoubtedly have heard from him, he had returned to his house a few days ago.

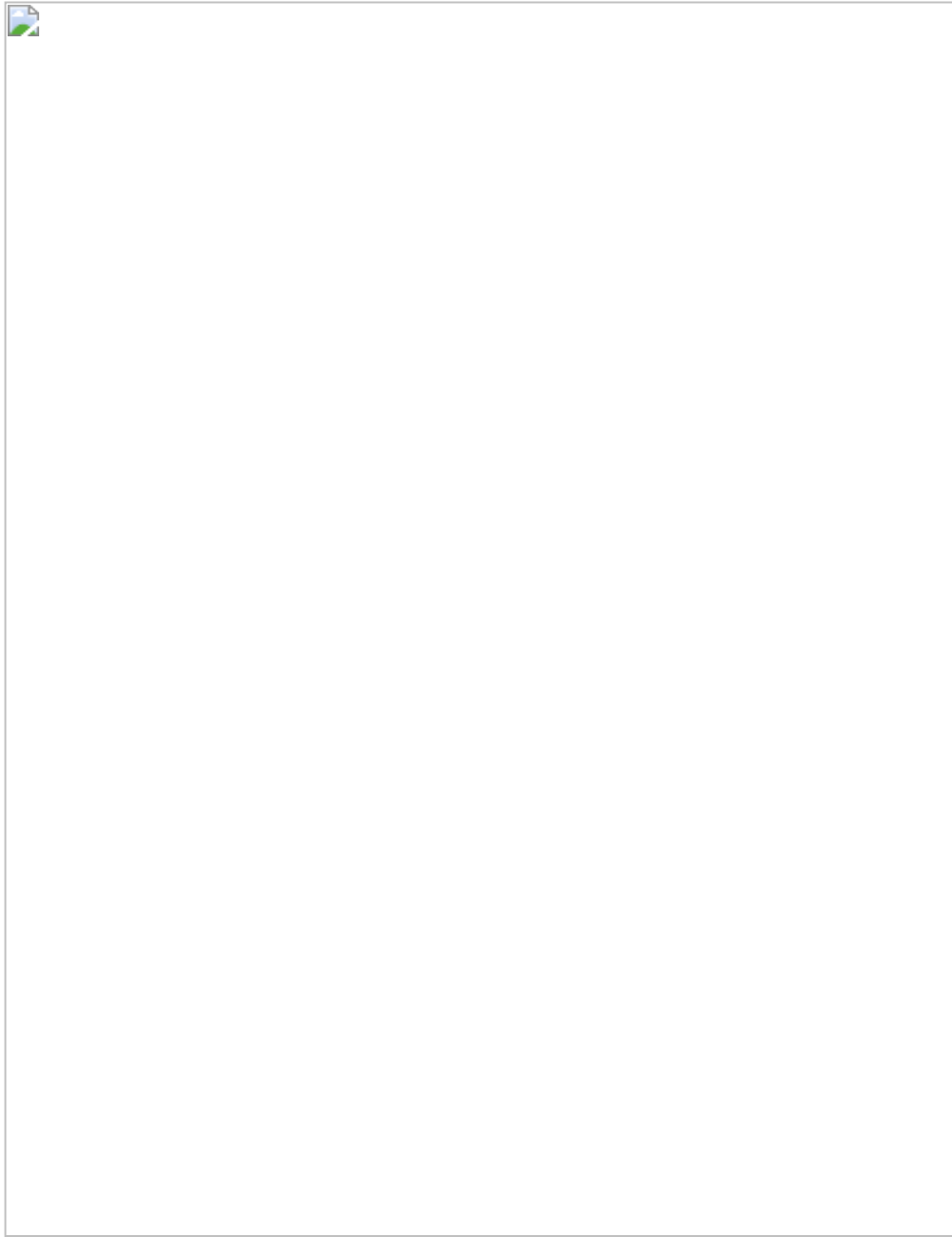
However, his behaviour, and the way he talked, made me fear that the improvement which had taken place was only apparent. This fear which we all had proved only too well-founded. A petition signed by some 30 neighbours, informed M. the Mayor of the inconvenience caused by allowing this man his complete liberty and mentions facts to support this assertion. The superintendent of police, to whom the document was submitted, has immediately had your brother taken back to the hospital with the express order not to let him leave. He came to my house to inform me of the situation, and to ask me to write to you.

It is clear that a decision has to be made. Is it your intention to come and take your brother with you, or to put him yourself into an institution of your own choice? Or do you prefer to leave it in the hands of the police? On this point we should have a categorical reply.

Will you without hesitation make your intentions known, and address them either to myself or to the Mayor or to the superintendent of police. We will only act after having received your reply and we will act according to your wishes.

I had rather hoped to have some better news, and that stopped me from writing to you sooner to acknowledge receipt of your letter and the 50 F. that it contained. This sum I have had taken to my home by the cleaning woman.

My deepest sympathies, and I assure you of my best wishes. Salles.

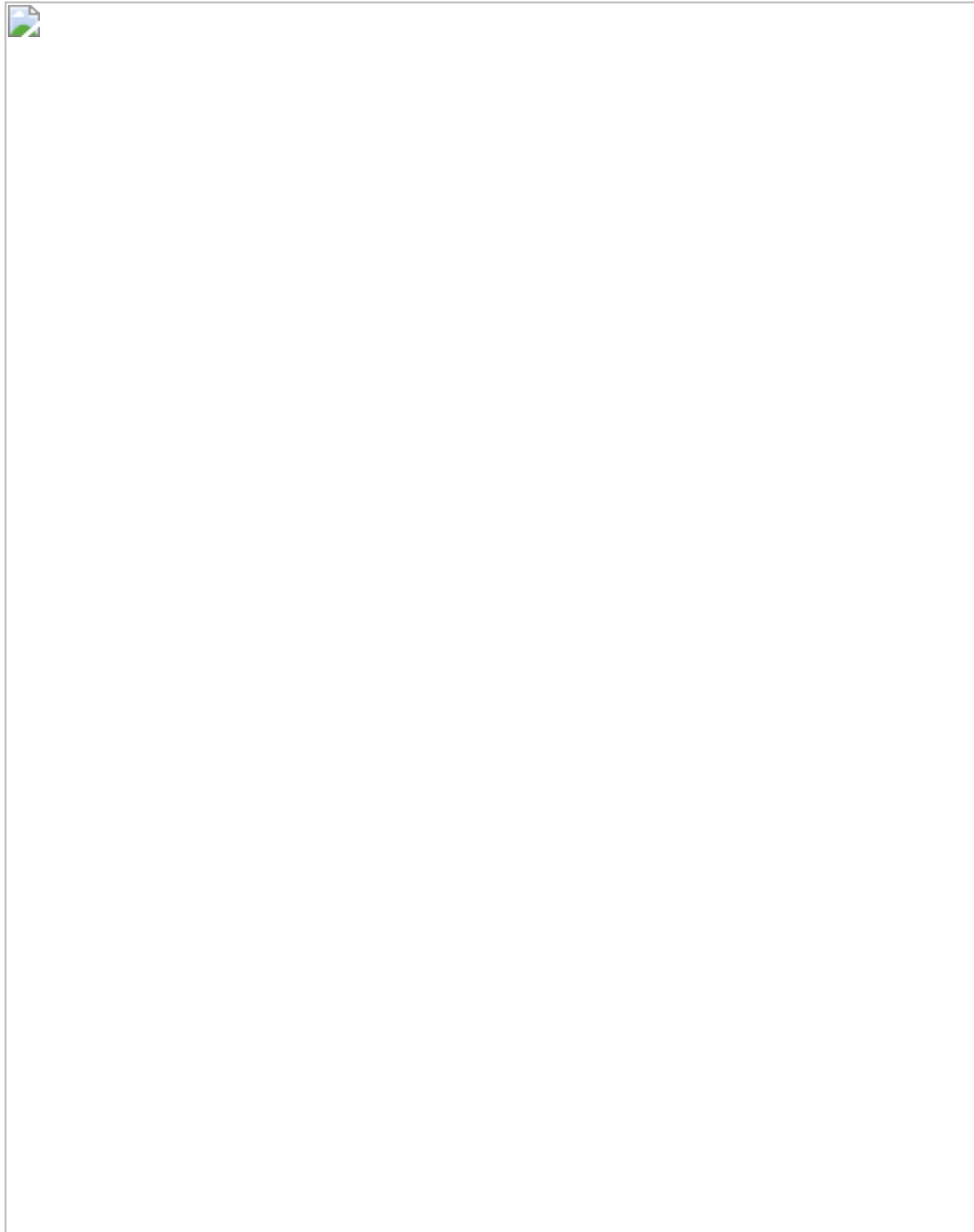


212. *Trunk of an Old Yew*,  
Arles, 1888. Oil on canvas,  
51 x 71 cm. Private Collection.





213. *Prairie with a Weeping Willow*,  
Arles, July 1888. Oil on canvas,  
60.5 x 73.5 cm. Private Collection.



214. *Midday, or The Garden Behind a House*,  
Arles, August 1888. Oil on canvas,  
63.5 x 52.5 cm. Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich.



215. *The Green Vineyard*,  
Arles, September 1888. Oil on canvas,  
72 x 92 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Paris, 14 April 1889**

Paris, 14 April 1889

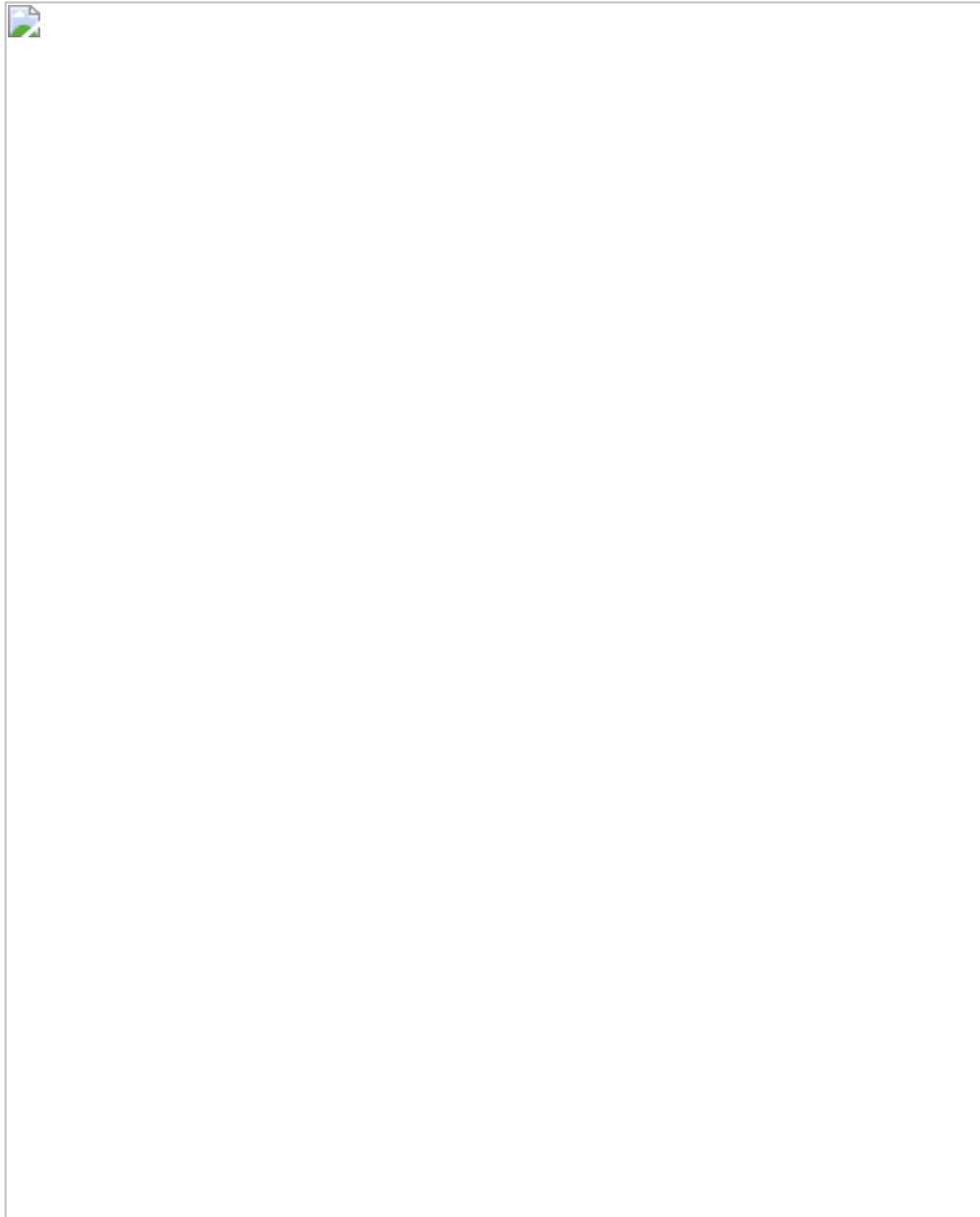
My dear Vincent,

I was greatly touched by your letter, which we received yesterday; really, you are making far too much of something which is entirely natural, without taking into account that you have repaid me many times over, by your work as well as by your friendship, which is of greater value than all the money I shall ever possess. It is very painful for me to know that you are still in an imperfect state of health. Though it seems to me that nothing in your letter betrays a weakness of the mind - on the contrary - the fact that you deem it necessary to go to a sanatorium is in itself rather serious. Let's hope that this is meant only as a preventative measure. Seeing that I know you well enough to consider you capable of all imaginable sacrifices, I have been contemplating the possibility that you have thought of this solution in order to inconvenience less those who know you. If this should be the case, I implore you not to do it, for life in such an establishment can hardly be pleasant. So you should know well what you are going to do, and I think you ought to consider whether you should perhaps try something else first. Either you might come here for some time, or you might go to Port-Aven during the summer, or again you might go and board with people who would take care of you.

If, however, there was no hidden meaning in what you said when you wrote me, I think that you are quite right in going to St. Rémy. By staying there for some time you will be able to regain confidence in your strength, and nothing will prevent you from returning to Arles after a certain lapse of time, if you should feel the inclination. Mr. Salles sent me some prospectuses of the St. Rémy establishment, and it says that a third person should apply for admission. So I enclose the letter to the director of the establishment, which you may use as you think fit. As soon as you have decided to go away, I shall let you have the necessary money.



216. *Farm in the Wheat Fields*,  
Arles, May 1888. Oil on canvas,  
45 x 50 cm. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



217. *Path near Arles*,  
Arles, May 1888. Oil on canvas,  
61 x 50 cm. Pommern Foundation, Kiel.



Now I only want to add that we have been here since Saturday. By Monday we had more or less installed ourselves, and the apartment looks more lived in every day, thanks to all sorts of inventions of Jo's. We thoroughly understand each other, so we feel such a complete mutual satisfaction that we feel happier than I should say. We left Mother and the sisters in perfect health. Mother seems to be growing younger. She has now returned to Breda after an absence of about a month.

My wedding gave her a lot of pleasure, particularly because Jo and she and Wil got on perfectly with each other; besides, she has something so sincere in her ways that there are quite a number of people on whom she makes a very pleasant impression.

Although there are many things in life which she knows nothing of, and which she will have to form an opinion about, she has such a foundation of good will and of zeal for doing the right thing that I am no longer afraid of the disillusion which I feared before our marriage. Up until now all goes better than I have been able to imagine, and I never dared hope for so much happiness.

In Holland I lacked the time to see many pictures; notwithstanding this I saw the " Jewish Bride " and the other Rembrandts again, the Frans Halses at Haarlem which I thought more beautiful than ever before, and the portrait of an old woman by Rembrandt in the Museum at Brussels. How beautiful the last-named picture is. There is really nothing more remarkable and characteristic in Holland than those old portraits. One feels far removed from this epoch when one looks at the fellows of today. There was an exhibition at C.M.'s of charcoal sketches by Mauve, leaves out of his sketchbooks. Very touching things. Jet gave us one of these drawings as a present, of which I am very, very glad.

Write us soon what you have definitely decided, and do not despair, for assuredly better days will come to you.

I shake both your hands.

Theo



218. *Ricks of Straw*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
28.5 x 37 cm. Private Collection.



219. *The Harvest at La Crau with  
Montmajour in the Background,*  
Arles, June 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, c. 21 April 1889**

My dear Theo,

You will probably be back in Paris at the moment when this letter arrives. I wish you and your wife a great deal of happiness. Thank you very much for your kind letter and for the 100-franc note it contained.

Out of the 65 francs which I owe, I have paid only 25 francs to my landlord, having had to pay three months' rent in advance for a room which I shan't be living in, but where I have sent my furniture, and having besides had expenses of 10 francs or so for moving, etc.

Then as my clothes were not in too brilliant a condition and I had to have something new to go out in the street in, I got a suit for 35 francs and spent 4 francs on six pairs of socks. So out of the note I have only a few francs left, and at the end of the month I must pay the landlord again, though he might be kept waiting for a few days.

I settled my bill at the hospital today, and there is still almost enough for the rest of the month out of the money I still have on deposit. At the end of the month I should like to go to the hospital in St. Rémy, or another institution of this kind, of which M. Salles has told me. Forgive me if I don't go into details and argue the pros and cons of such a step.

Talking about it would be mental torture.

It will be enough, I hope, if I tell you that I feel quite unable to take a new studio and to stay there alone - here in Arles or elsewhere, for the moment it is all the same; I have tried to make up my mind to begin again, but at the moment it's not possible.

I should be afraid of losing the power to work, which is coming back to me now, by forcing myself and by having all the other responsibilities of a studio on my shoulders besides.

And temporarily I wish to remain shut up as much for my own peace of mind as for other people's. What comforts me a little is that I am beginning to consider madness as a disease like any other and accept the thing as such, whereas during the crises themselves I thought that everything I imagined was real. Anyway, the fact is that I do not want to think or talk about it. You'll spare me any explanations, but I ask you and Messrs. Salles and Rey

to arrange things so that I can go there as a resident boarder at the end of this month or the beginning of May.

Beginning again that painter's life I have been living, isolated in the studio so often, and without any other means of distraction than going to a cafe or a restaurant with all the neighbors criticizing, etc., I can't face it; going to live with another person, say another artist - difficult, very difficult - it's taking too much responsibility on oneself. I dare not even think of it.

So let's try it three months to begin with, and afterward we shall see. Now one's board ought to be about 80 francs, and I shall do a little painting and drawing without putting such frenzy into it as a year ago. Do not be grieved at all this. Certainly these last days were sad, with all the moving, taking away all my furniture, packing up the canvases that are going to you, but the thing I felt saddest about was that you had given me all these things with such brotherly love, and that for so many years you were always the one who supported me, and then to be obliged to come back and tell you this sorry tale - but it's difficult to express it as I felt it. The goodness you have shown me is not lost, because you had it and it remains for you; even if the material results should be nil, it remains for you all the more; but I can't say it as I felt it. Meanwhile you do understand that if alcohol has undoubtedly been one of the great causes of my madness, then it came on very slowly and will go away slowly too, assuming it does go, of course. Or the same thing if it comes from smoking. But I should only hope that it - this recovery [probably a word has been omitted here] the frightful superstition of some people on the subject of alcohol, so that they prevail upon themselves never to drink or smoke.

We are already ordered not to lie or steal, etc., and not to commit other crimes great or small and it would become too complicated if it was absolutely indispensable to have nothing but virtues in the society in which we are very undeniably planted, whether it be good or bad.

I assure you that during those queer days when many things seem odd to me because my brain is agitated; through it all I don't dislike old Pangloss.

But you would do me a service by discussing the question frankly with M. Salles and M. Rey.

I should think that with an allowance of 75 francs or so a month there must be a way of interning me so that should have everything I need.

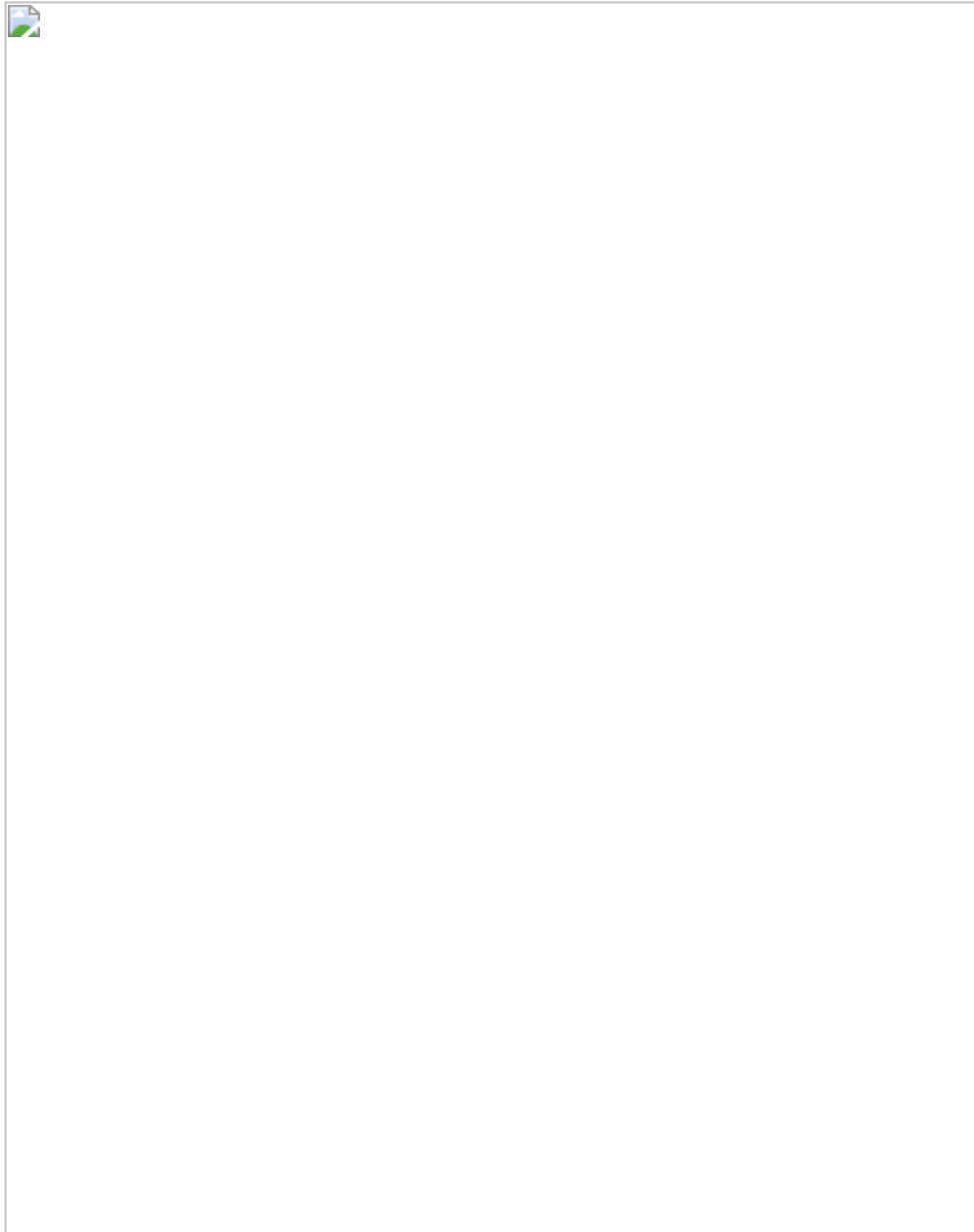
Then, if it is possible, I'd very much like to be able to go out in the daytime and draw or paint outside. Seeing that I go out every day now here,

and think that this could continue.

Paying more, I warn you, would make me less happy. The company of other patients, you understand, is not at all disagreeable to me; on the contrary, it distracts me.

Ordinary food suits me quite well, especially if they gave me a little more wine there, as they do here usually a half-liter instead of a quarter for instance.





220. *Wheat Field with Sheaves*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
73 x 54 cm. Musée Rodin, Paris.



221. *Harvest in Provence*,  
Arles, June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
50 x 60 cm. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.



222. *Wheat Stacks in Provence*,  
Arles, c. 12-13 June 1888. Oil on canvas,  
73 x 92.5 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



223. *Park at Arles*,  
Arles, October 1888. Oil on canvas,  
72 x 93 cm. Private Collection.

But a private room - it remains to be seen what the arrangements of an institution like that would be. Mind you Rey is overburdened with work, overburdened. If he writes to you, or M. Salles, better do exactly what they say. After all we must take our share, my boy, of the diseases of our time - in a way it is only fair after all that, having lived some years in comparatively good health, we should have our share sooner or later. As for me, you know well enough that I should not exactly have chosen madness if I had had a choice, but once you have an affliction of that sort, you can't catch it again. And there'll perhaps be the consolation of being able to go on working a bit at painting.

How will you manage not to speak too well or too ill of Paris and many other things to your wife? Do you feel in advance that you will be quite capable of keeping exactly the golden mean all the time and from all points of view?

I shake your hand in thought. I do not know if I shall write very, very often because not all my days are clear enough for me to write fairly logically. All your kindness to me seemed greater than ever to me today. I can't put the way I feel it in words, but I assure you that this kindness has been pure gold, and if you do not see any results from it, my dear brother, don't fret about it; your own goodness abides. Only transfer this affection to your wife as much as possible. And if we correspond somewhat less, you will see that if she is what I think her, she will comfort you. That is what I hope.

Rey is a very nice fellow, a tremendous worker, always on the job. What men the modern doctors are! If you see Gauguin or write to him, remember me to him.

I shall be very glad to hear any news you can give me of our mother and sister, and if they are well; tell them to look upon this affair of mine - I mean it - as nothing to be inordinately distressed about, because I may be comparatively unfortunate, but after all, in spite of that, I may still have some almost normal years before me. It is a disease like any other, and now almost everyone we know among our friends has something the matter with him. So is it worth talking about? I am sorry to give trouble to M. Salles, and Rey, and above all to you to o, but what is one to do? My head isn't steady enough to begin again as before - then the important thing is not to cause any more scenes in public, and naturally, being a little calmer now, I distinctly

feel that I was mentally and physically in an unhealthy condition. And then people have been kind, those I remember, and as for the others, after all I caused some uneasiness, and if I had been in a normal condition, things would never have happened the way they did.

Goodbye, write when you can.

Ever yours, Vincent





224. *The Red Vineyard*,  
Arles, November 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 75 x 93 cm.  
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, 30 April 1889**

My dear Theo,

On the occasion of the first of May [Theo's birthday] I wish you a tolerably good year, and above all good health.

How I should like to pass on to you some of my physical strength. I have the feeling I've too much of it at the moment. Which does not prevent my head from still not being all that it should be.

How right Delacroix was, who lived on bread and wine alone, and who succeeded in finding a way of life in keeping with his vocation. But the inevitable question of money is ever-present - Delacroix had private means. Corot too. And Millet - Millet was a peasant and the son of a peasant.

You may perhaps be interested in reading this article I cut out of a Marseilles paper because one catches a glimpse of Monticelli in it, and I find the description of the painting representing a corner of the churchyard very interesting. But alas, it's yet another deplorable story.

How sad it is to think that a painter who succeeds, even if only in part, pulls along half a dozen artists who are worse failures than himself.

However, remember Pangloss, remember Bouvard et Pécuchet - I do - and even that becomes clear then. But perhaps those people don't know Pangloss, or else, fatally marked by real despair and great suffering, they have forgotten all they knew about him.

And anyway, we are falling back again in the name of optimism on a religion that strikes me as the rear end of some sort of Buddhism. No harm in that, on the contrary, if that's what one wants.

I don't like the article on Monet in the Figaro very much - how much better that other article in the 19<sup>me</sup> Siècle was! One could see the pictures in that, and this one is full of nothing but depressing banalities.

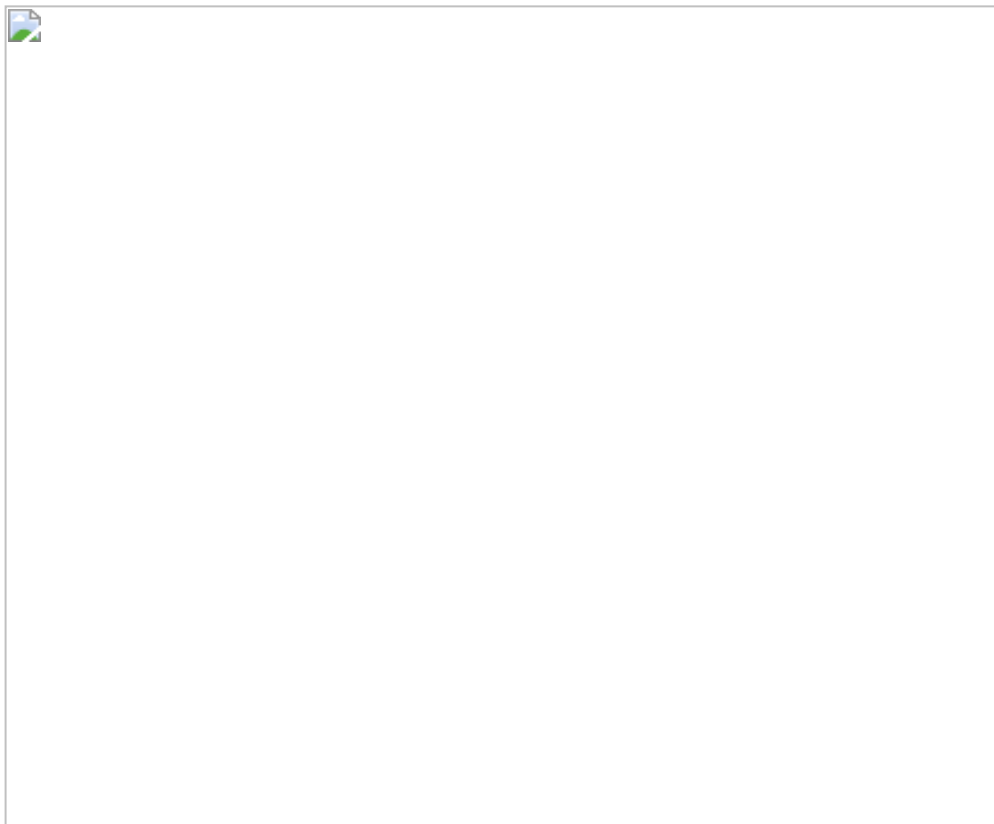
Today I am stuck in the middle of packing a case of pictures and studies. I've stuck some newspapers on to one which is flaking - it's one of the best, and I think that when you've had a look at it you'll understand more clearly what my studio, now come to grief, could have been. This study, just like some of the others, was spoiled by the damp while I was ill.

The flood water came up to within a stone's throw of the house, and more important, since the house wasn't heated during my absence, by the time I

got back water and saltpeter were oozing from the walls.



225. *The Sower*,  
Arles, November 1888. Oil on canvas,  
32 x 40 cm. Private Collection.



226. *Pollard Willow*,  
Arles, April 1889. Oil on canvas, 55 x 65 cm.  
Collection of Stavros S. Niarchos, London.

That was a blow to me, since not only the studio had come to grief, but even the studies that would have been reminders of it. It is all so final, and my urge to establish something very simple but lasting was so strong. I was fighting a losing battle, or rather it was weakness of character on my part, for I am left with feelings of deep remorse about it, difficult to describe. I think that was the reason I cried out so much during the attacks - I wanted to defend myself and couldn't do it. For it was not to me, it was precisely to painters such as the poor wretch about whom the enclosed article speaks that the studio could have been of use.

In fact, we had several predecessors. Bruyas at Montpellier gave a whole fortune to that, a whole life, and without the slightest apparent result.

Yes - a chilly room in the municipal gallery where you can see a troubled face and many fine pictures, where you certainly feel moved, but, alas, moved as in a graveyard.

Yet it would be difficult to walk through a graveyard that demonstrated more clearly the existence of that *Espérance* which Puvis de Chavannes has painted.

Pictures fade like flowers - even some of Delacroix's have suffered in this way, the magnificent *Daniel*, *Les Odalisques* (quite different from those in the Louvre, it was in a single range of purplish-blue), but how they impressed me, those pictures fading there, little understood, that's for sure, by most of the visitors who look at Courbet and Cabanel and Victor Giraud, etc.

What are we, we other painters?

Oh, well, I'm sure Richepin is quite right, for instance when he brutally bursts in and consigns them straight back to the madhouse with his profanities.

However, I assure you that I know of no hospital where they would be willing to take me in for nothing, even supposing that I myself shouldered the painting expenses and left the whole of my work to the hospital.

And that is, I don't say a great, but still a small injustice. Even so, I should feel resigned if one took me in. If I were without your friendship, they would drive me remorselessly to suicide, and coward that I am, I should end by committing it. At this point, I hope, we are permitted to protest against society and to defend ourselves.

We can be fairly sure that the Marseilles artist who committed suicide in no way did it under the influence of absinthe, for the simple reason that no one is likely to have offered him any and he could not have had anything to buy it with. Besides, he would not have drunk it purely for pleasure, but because, being ill already, he kept himself going with it.

M. Salles has been to Saint-Rémy - they are not willing to give me permission to paint outside the institution, nor take me for less than 100 francs.

So this is pretty bad news.

If I could get out of this mess by joining the Foreign Legion for 5 years, I think I should prefer that.

For on the one hand, being locked up and not working, I should find it hard to get better, and on the other hand, they would make us pay 100 francs a month during the whole long life of a madman.

It's a bad business, and what are we to make of it? But would they be willing to have me as a soldier?

I feel very tired after the conversation with M. Salles, and I don't quite know what to do. I myself advised Bernard to do his service there, so it's hardly surprising that I'm considering going to Arabia as a soldier myself.

I say that so you will not blame me too much if I do go. Everything else is so vague and so strange. And you know how doubtful it is that one will ever get back what it costs to paint. For the rest, it seems I am physically well.

Supposing I am only allowed to work under supervision! And in the institution - my God, is it worth paying money for that? In that case I could certainly work just as well, even better, in the barracks.

Anyway, I'm thinking about it. You do so as well. Let us remember that all is for the best in the best of all worlds - it's not impossible.

A really good handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

Here is what I think is worth putting on stretchers from the consignment.

The Night Café - The Alyscamps (lane of tombs)

The Green Vineyard - ditto

The Red Vineyard - Garden with large conifer bush and oleanders  
[Painting lost]

The Bedroom

The Furrows - ditto with cedar & geraniums

ditto [Unknown painting] - Sunflowers



Portrait of Boch - Flowers, scabious, etc.[Unknown painting]

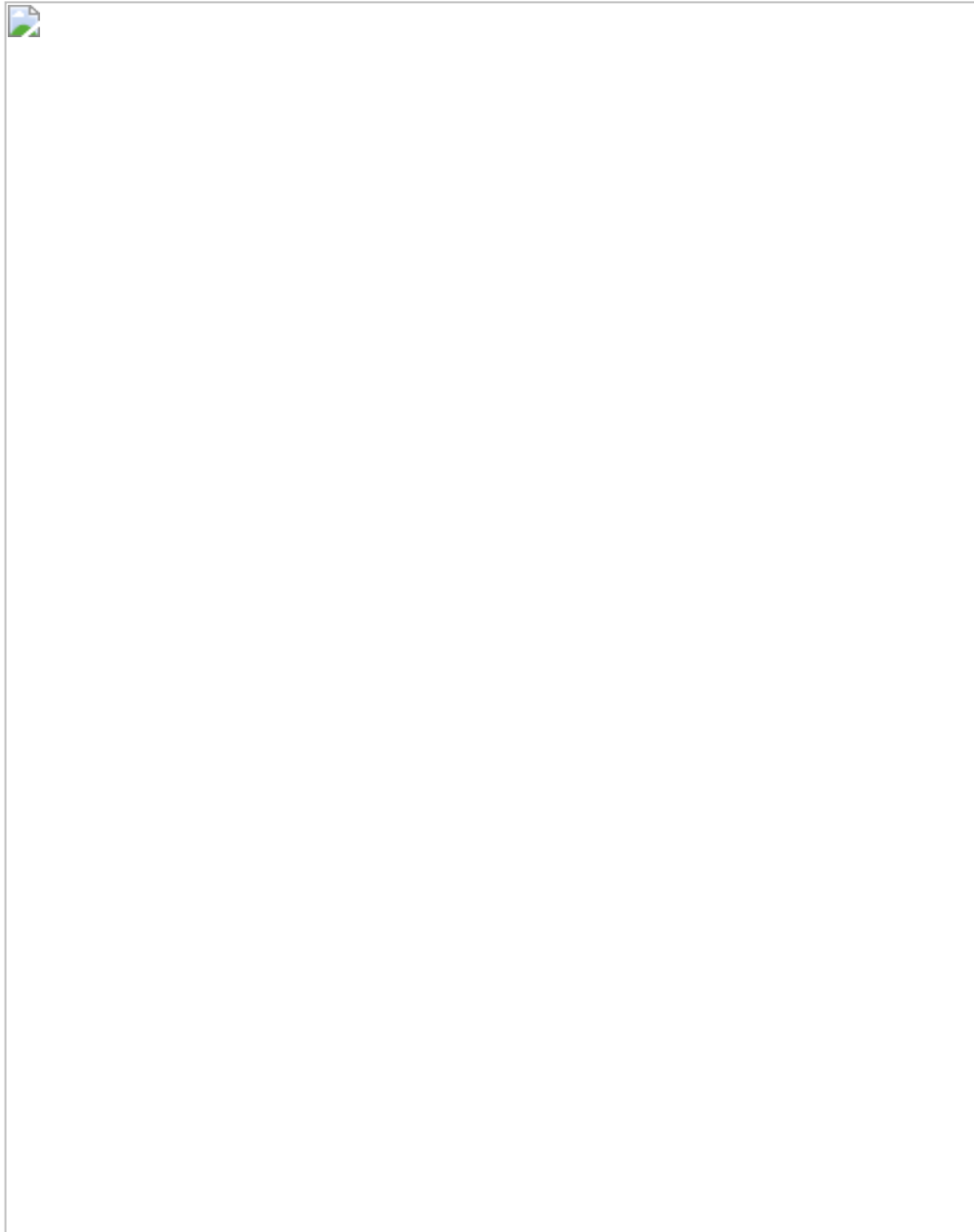
Portrait of Laval - ditto, asters, marigolds, etc.[Unknown painting]

Portrait of Gauguin

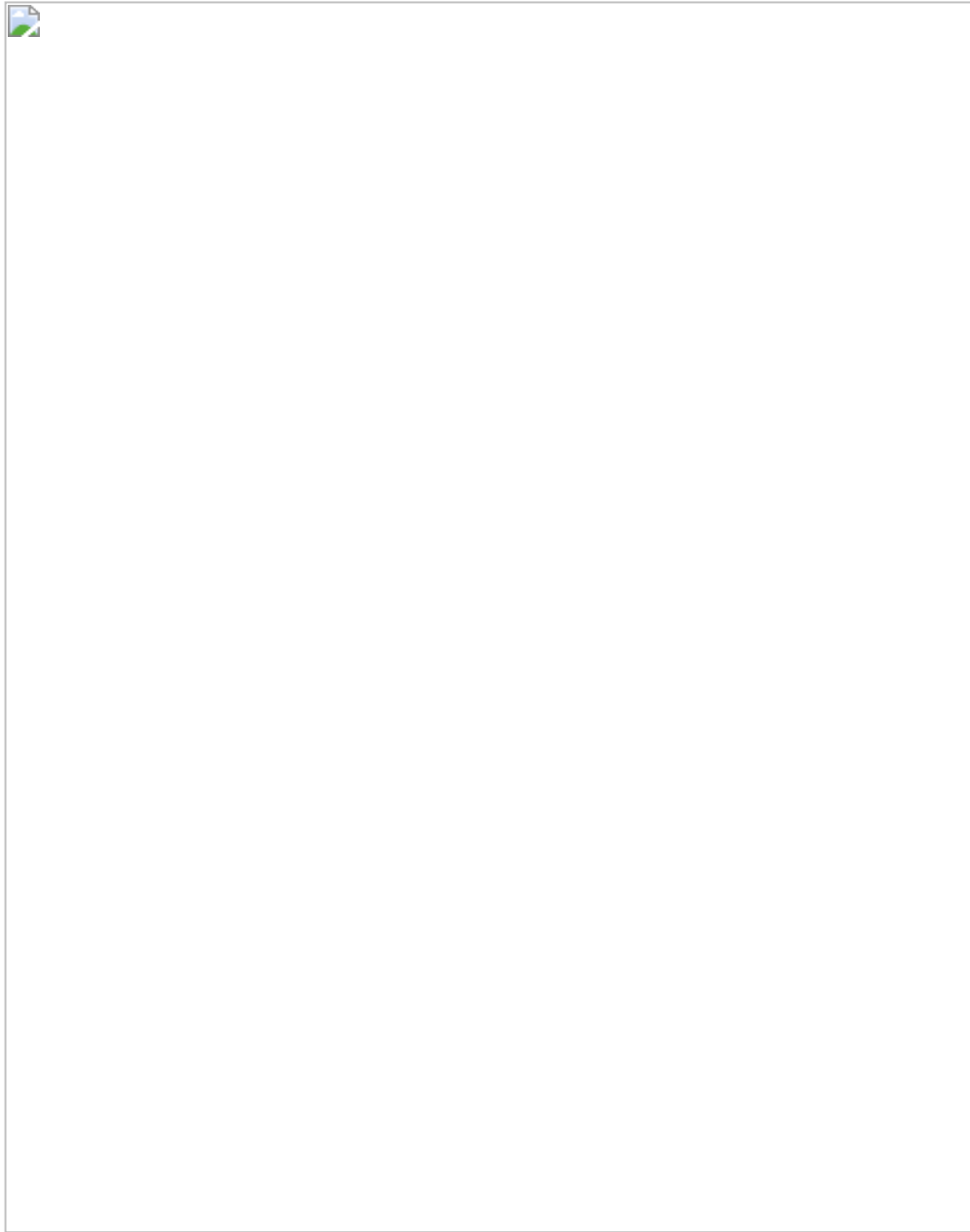
Portrait of Bernard

The packing case contains some studies by Gauguin which belong to him, and his two fencing masks and some fencing gloves.

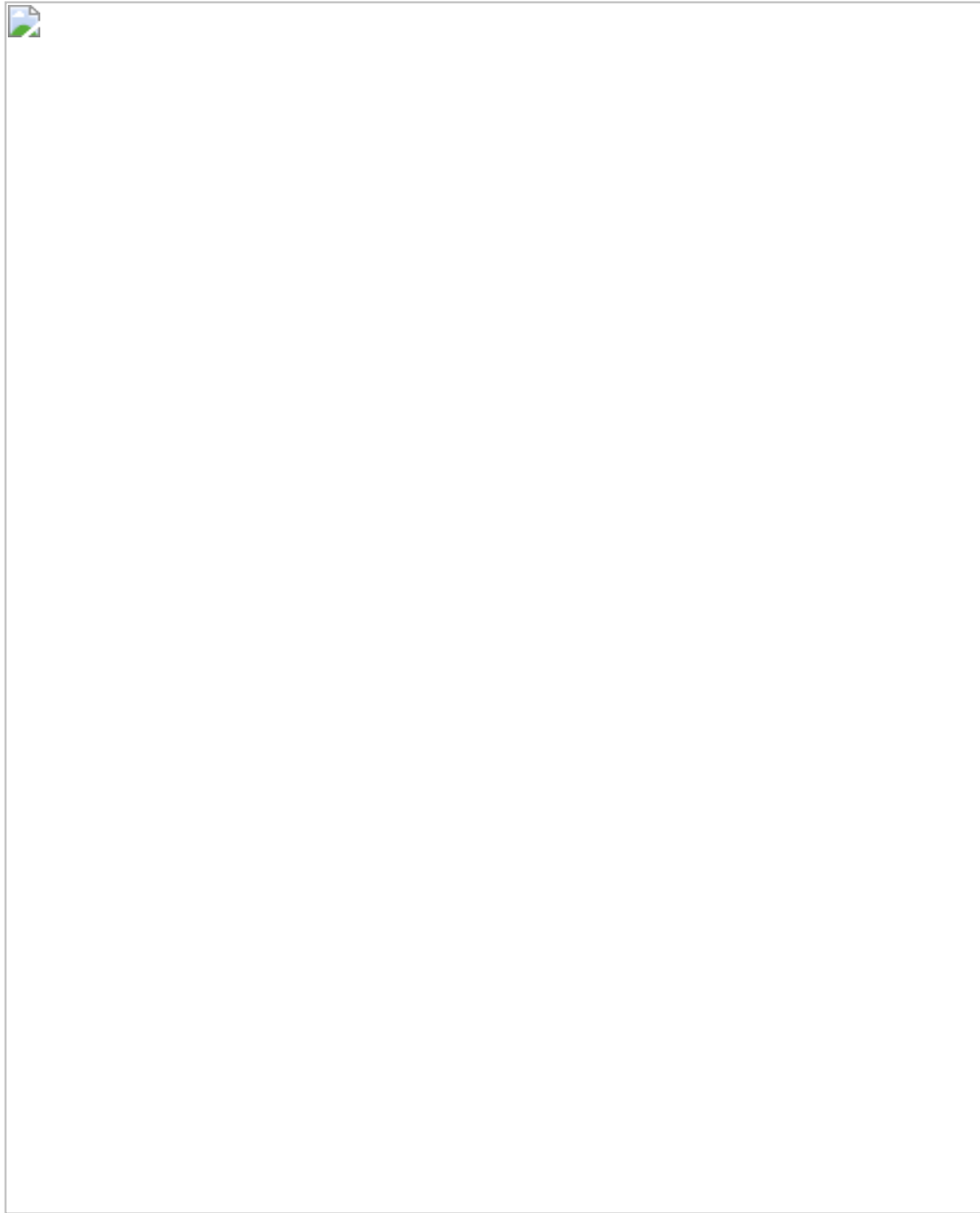
If there is room in the packing case, I'll add some stretchers.



227. *The Alyscamps*,  
Arles, October 1888. Oil on canvas,  
89 x 72 cm. Private Collection.



228. *Still Life of Sunflowers*,  
Arles, January 1889. Oil on canvas,  
91 x 71 cm. Staatsgalerie Moderner Kunst, Munich.



229. *Sunflowers, First Version*,  
Arles, late August 1888. Oil on canvas,  
73 x 58 cm. Private Collection.



230. *La Berceuse (Portrait of Augustine Roulin)*,  
Arles, January 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 91 x 71.5 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Arles, 2 May 1889**

Paris, 2 May 1889

My dear Vincent,

Many thanks for your letter, which shows us that at least your physical strength leaves nothing to be desired, seeing that you say you have too much of it; however, this is something you should not rely on; feeling one's strength does not mean having much of it; but if it is really true, all the better. Now there is one thing in your letter which I entirely disapprove of, and I am going to tell you what it is, and after that you may do what you like. I mean your plans to join the Foreign Legion.

It is meant as an act of despair, isn't it? For I don't think you have developed a taste for that profession spontaneously. The fact is that you can do no painting at the moment; that you are in a state of convalescence, and this fact has given you the idea that you will never be able to paint again, and so you tell yourself that three months of being taken care of without being able to work cost money and don't bring any in. But you forget that, suppose they let you work when you are a soldier, you will be kept like a boy in a boarding school, and that, if you are already afraid of the supervision of an establishment like the one at St. Rémy, you will have a great deal more to fear from the practices of military life. Viewed as a whole, this idea is born of an exaggerated dread and is causing me expense and worry, and you consequently bother your head unnecessarily. Last year was not a bad one for me as far as money is concerned, so you may count on what I sent you before without any scruple and without fear of causing me trouble. If it is not repulsive to you to go to St. Rémy, say for only a month, you will be examined by medical specialists, and you will probably be able to profit by their advice.

On the other hand, the director of the establishment at St. Rémy tells me in a letter he wrote me that he will not pledge himself to anything with reference to allowing you to go out before he has examined you, but I suppose that after he has seen you, there will be no doubt about his leaving you free to go out in order to work.

As for me, I attribute a large part of your disease to the fact that your material existence has been too neglected. In an establishment like the one at

St. Rémy there will be approximately the same regularity in the mealtimes and so on, and I think this regularity will do you no harm - on the contrary. Now if you should prefer, we might try to get information about the establishment at Aix or Marseilles in order to see whether they make other conditions there. What you ought to know is that from one point of view you are not to be pitied, though it may not seem so.

How many are there who would be glad of having done the work you have accomplished; what more do you ask; wasn't it your cherished wish to create something, and if it was granted you to make what you have made, then why do you despair that a time will come when you will do good work again? However bad society may be at present, there are still ways of living in it; witness Puvis de Chavannes, Degas, and others. I feel sure that if you have the will, you'll be able to take up your work again very soon. For all that, don't think that I am without fellow feeling for your disillusionment when, for example, you went back to your studio and found it all moldy because of the moisture.

Yet be of good heart; your disasters will surely come to an end.

The kindest regards from my wife, who is in good health. She is getting quite accustomed to the house. A hearty handshake.

Theo



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Arles, 3 May 1889**

My dear Theo,

Your kind letter did me good today, honestly - so now here's for St. Rémy. But I tell you once more, if on consideration and after consulting the doctor it should perhaps be either necessary or simply advisable and wise to enlist, let's give it the same consideration as everything else and have no prejudice against it. That's all! You must put aside any idea of sacrifice in it. The other day I again wrote our sister that all through my life, or at least most of it, I have sought something other than a martyr's career, for which I am not cut out.

If I find trouble or cause it, honestly, I am aghast at it. Certainly I should respect, I should heartily admire martyrs and the like, but you must know that in Bouvard et Pécuchet, for instance, there's something very different which accords better with these little lives of ours.

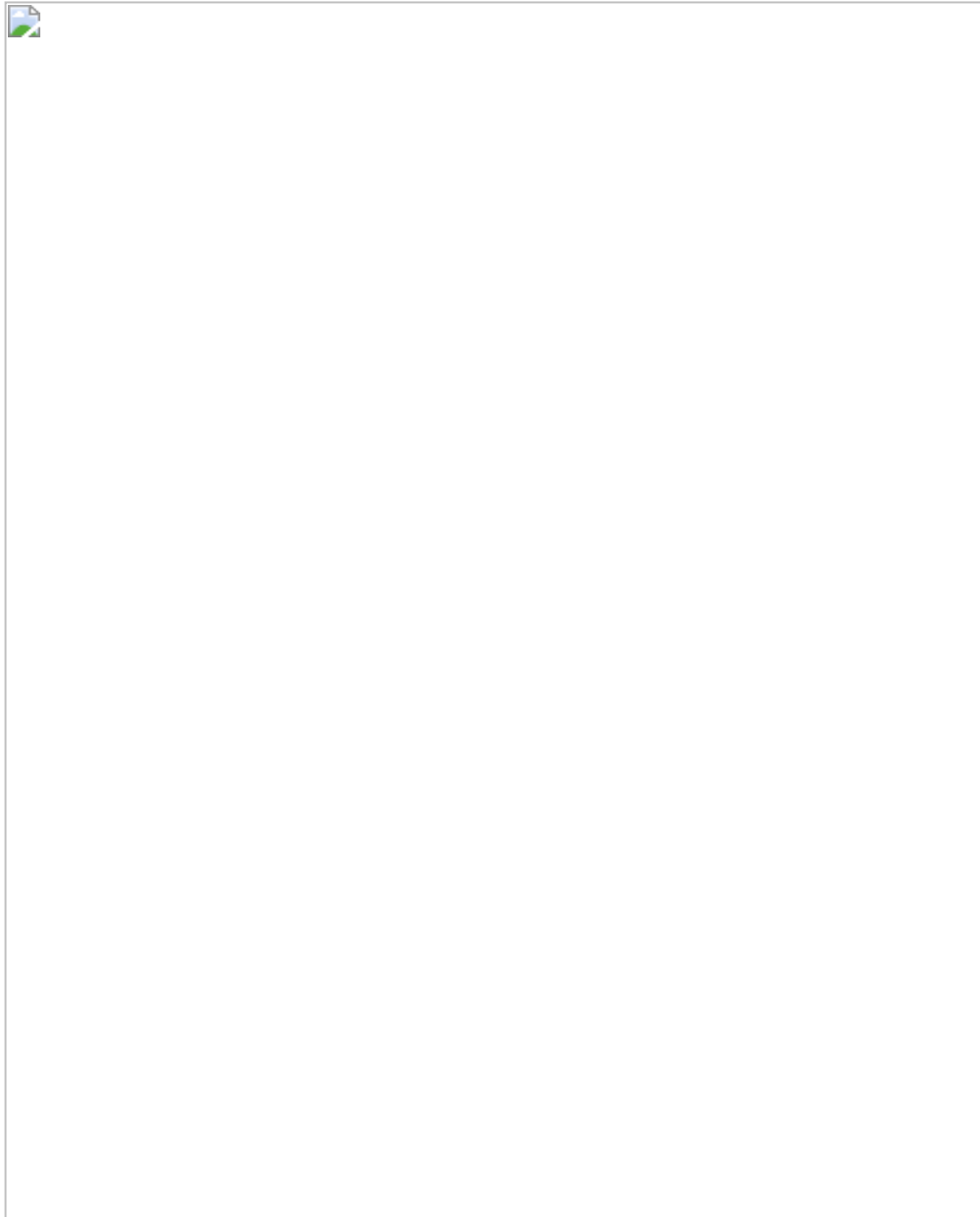
And now I am packing my trunk, and probably M. Salles will go over with me as soon as he can.

Ah! What you say about Puvis and Delacroix is damn true, those two have indeed demonstrated what painting could be, but don't let's confuse things that are worlds apart. Now I as a painter shall never amount to anything important, I am absolutely sure of it. Suppose all were changed, character, education, circumstances, then this or that might have been. But we are too positive to get confused. I sometimes regret I did not simply stick to the Dutch palette with its grey tones, and brush away at landscapes of Montmartre without any fuss. I am also thinking again of beginning to draw more with a reed pen, which, like last year's views of Montmajour for instance, costs less and distracts my mind just as much.

Today I made a drawing of that sort, which has turned out very dark and rather melancholy for one of spring, but anyhow whatever happens to me and in whatever circumstances I find myself, it's something which will keep me occupied enough and in some fashion might even make me a sort of livelihood.

After all, for you as well as for me, in the long run what is having a little more or a little less to contend with to us?

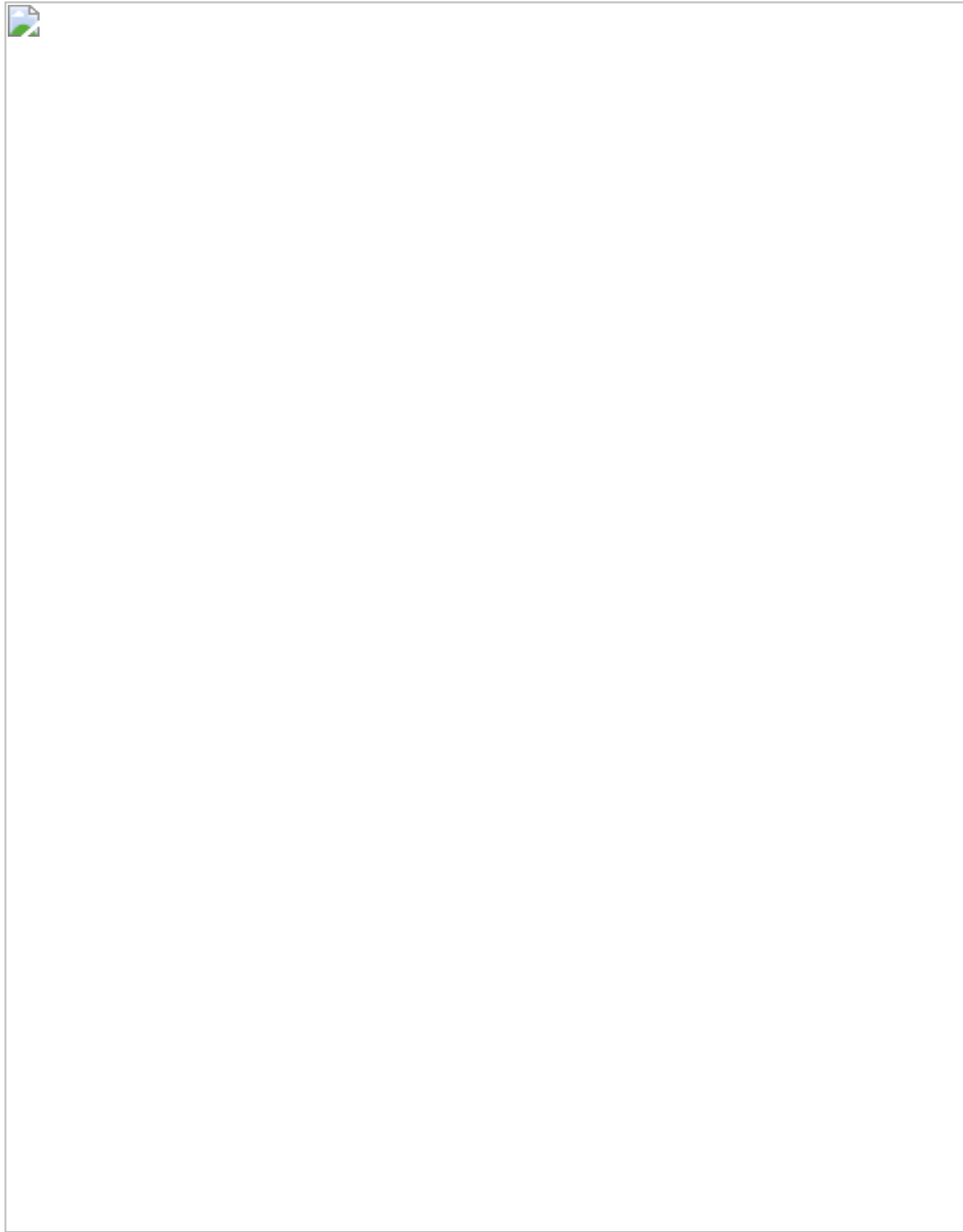
Certainly you enlisted a good deal sooner than I, if we come to that, at Goupils', where, indeed, you had some pretty bad moments often enough, and didn't always get much thanks for them.



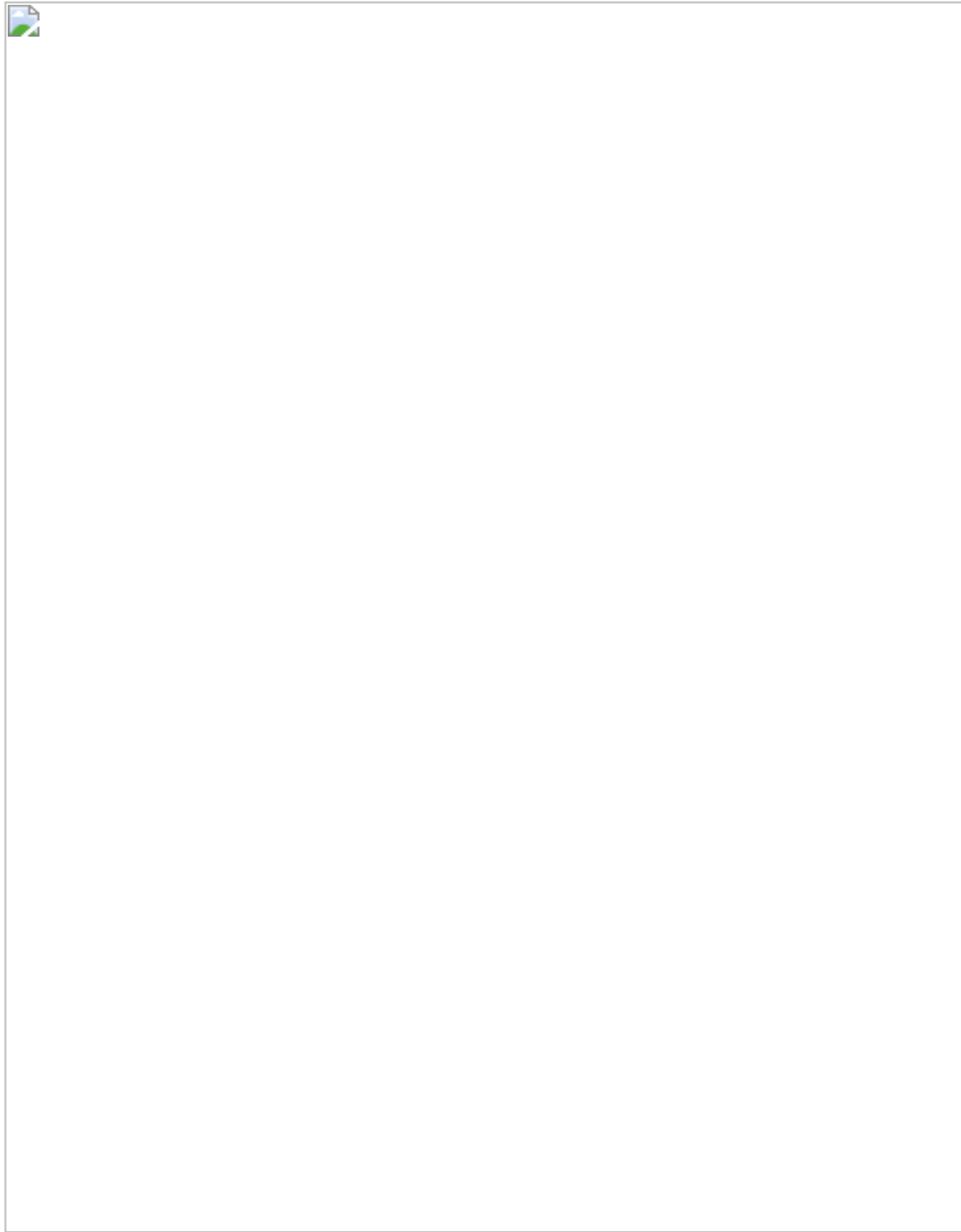
231. *Portrait of Doctor Rey*,  
Arles, January 1889. Oil on canvas,  
64 x 53 cm. The Pushkin State Museum  
of Fine Arts, Moscow.



232. *Portrait of Joseph Roulin*,  
Arles, February-March 1889. Oil on canvas,  
65 x 54 cm. Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



233. *Portrait of Postman Roulin*,  
Arles, early August 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 64.1 x 47.9 cm.  
The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.



234. *Portrait of Postman Joseph Roulin*,  
Arles, early August 1888. Oil on canvas,  
81.3 x 65.4 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

And, indeed, you did it with zeal and devotion, for just then Father was somewhat broke with that big family, and everything had to be kept going, and you threw yourself into it body and soul - during my illness I have been thinking of all these old things with a good deal of emotion.

And after all, the main thing is to feel our closeness to one another, and that is not yet shaken.

I have a sort of hope that with what on the whole I know of my art, the time will come when I shall produce again, even in the asylum. What use would the more artificial life of an artist in Paris be to me? I should never be more than half taken in by it, and so should lack the initial enthusiasm indispensable to starting me off.

It is amazing how well I am physically, but it isn't enough to be the basis of any hope for its being the same with me mentally.

I would willingly, once I am a little known there, try to become a hospital orderly little by little, in short, to work at something and have some occupation again - whatever presents itself.

I should be terribly in need of old Pangloss if in the natural course of things I should happen to turn amorous again. After all alcohol and tobacco have so much good or bad - it's rather relative - that they are anti-aprophrodisiacs, if one might call it that, I think. Not always to be despised in the exercise of the arts. Well, well, that's going to be the test, and one mustn't wholly forget to poke fun at things. For virtue and temperance, I am only too afraid, will again lead me into those parts where the compass is apt to go overboard pretty quickly, and where this time I must try to have less passion and more good humour.

The passionate factor is no great matter to me, as long as the power remains, as I dare hope, of feeling affection for the fellow creatures with whom one must live.

How is old Tanguy? - you must remember me to him.

I see in the papers that there are some good things at the Salon.

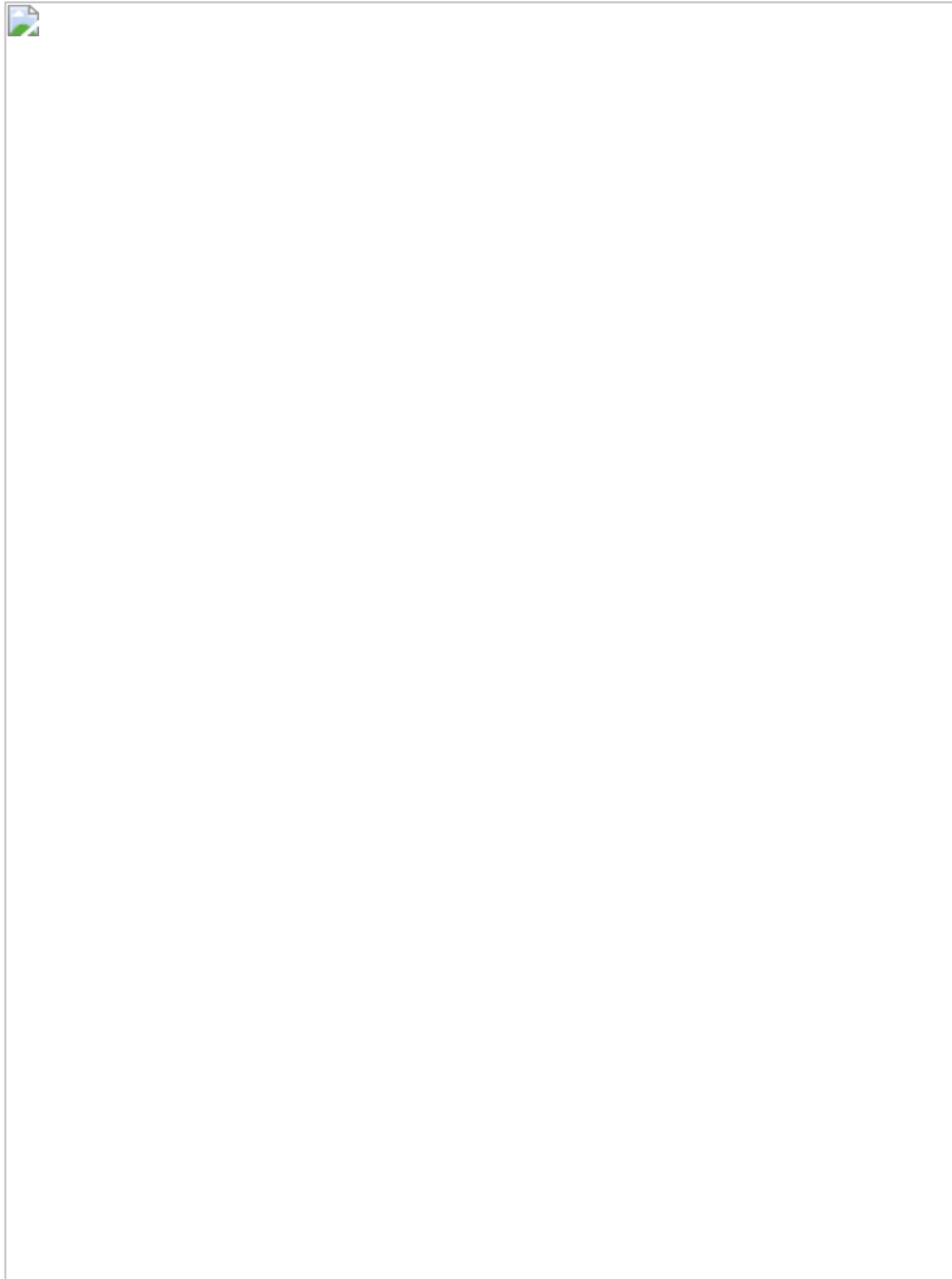
Listen - do not become completely and exclusively impressionist; after all, if there is good in anything, don't let's lose sight of it. Certainly colour is progressing primarily under the influence of the impressionists, even when they go astray, but already Delacroix had reached more completeness than they.



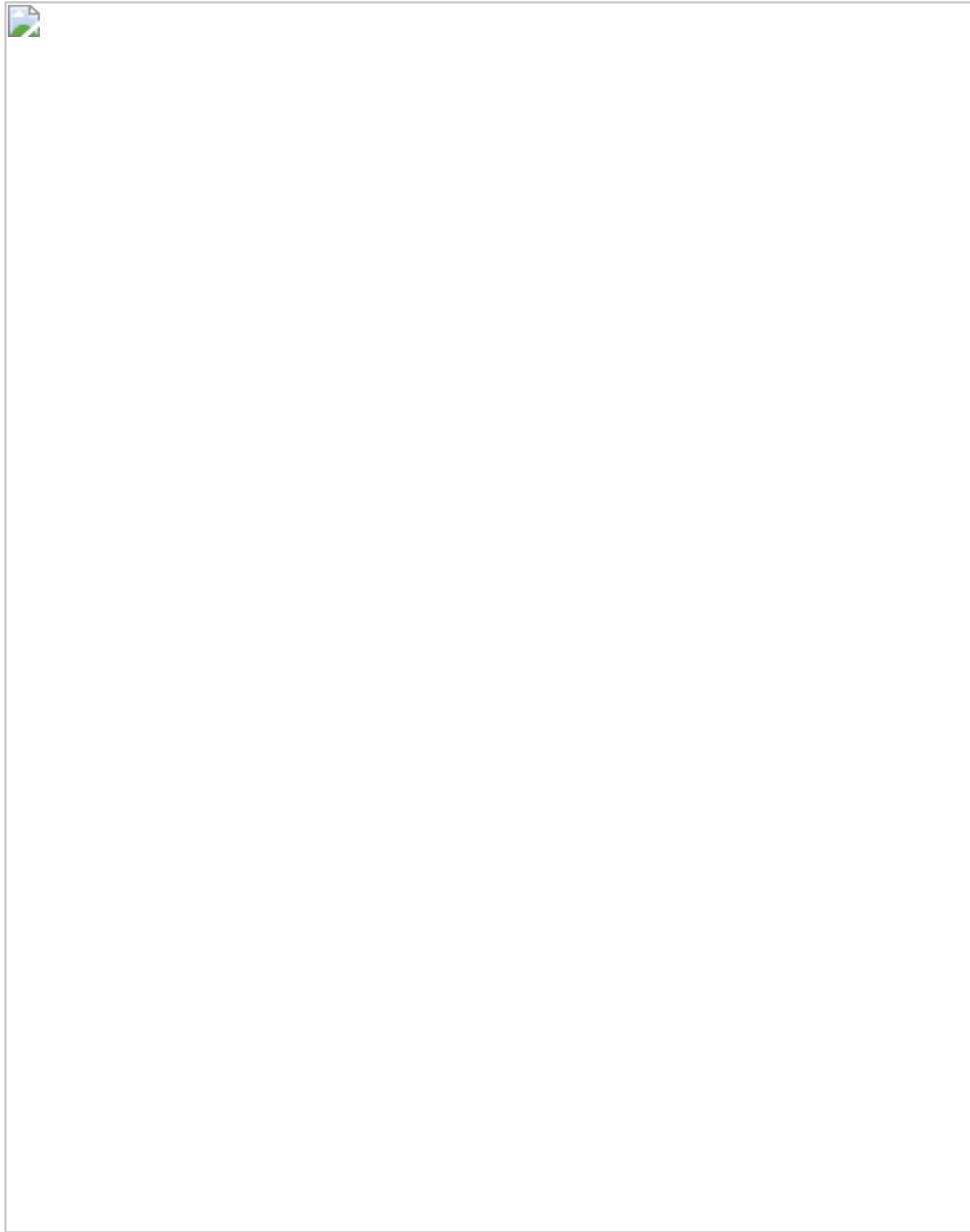
And confound it all, Millet, who has hardly any colour, what work it is! Madness is salutary in that one becomes less exclusive.

I am not sorry that I wanted to go into this question of the theories of colour rather technically.

As an artist you are only a link in a chain, and whatever you find or whatever you do not find, you can find comfort in it.



235. *Portrait of Armand Roulin*,  
Arles, November-December 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 66 x 55 cm.  
Folkwang Museum, Essen.



236. *Portrait of Armand Roulin*,  
Arles, November-December 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm.  
Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam.

I have heard of an interior all in green with a woman in green at the Salon, which was well spoken of, also of a portrait by Mathey and another by Besnard, "The Siren." They also say that there is something extraordinary by someone called Zorn, but they did not say what, and that there was a Carolus Duran, "Triumph of Bacchus," bad. Nevertheless I still think his "Lady with a Glove" in the Luxembourg very good; after all, there are some not-too-serious things which I like very much, such as a book like *Bel Ami*.

And the work of Carolus is a little like that. However, our period has been like that, and all Badinguet's\* period as well. And if a painter paints as he sees, he always remains somebody.

Ah, to paint figures as Claude Monet paints landscapes! That still, in spite of everything, remains to be done, unless one is to see only Monet in all the impressionists. For after all, in figure Delacroix, Millet, and several sculptors have done far better work than the impressionists and even J. Breton. In short, my boy, let's be fair, and, while withdrawing: I tell you whenever we think we are getting too old to class ourselves with the younger men, let us remember that in our time we have loved Millet, Breton, Israëls, Whistler, Delacroix and Leys.

And I'm quite sure that for my part I am pretty well convinced that I shall see no future beyond that, nor desire one.

Now society being what it is, we naturally cannot wish that it should conform to our personal needs. And so, though I am very, very glad to be going to St. Rémy, nevertheless it would be really fairer to men like myself to shove them into the Legion.

We can do nothing about it, it's more than likely that they would turn me down, at least here where what has happened to me is too well known, and above all exaggerated. I say this very, very seriously; physically I am better than I have been in years and years, and I could quite well be a soldier. Let's think this over again, even though I'm going to St. Rémy.

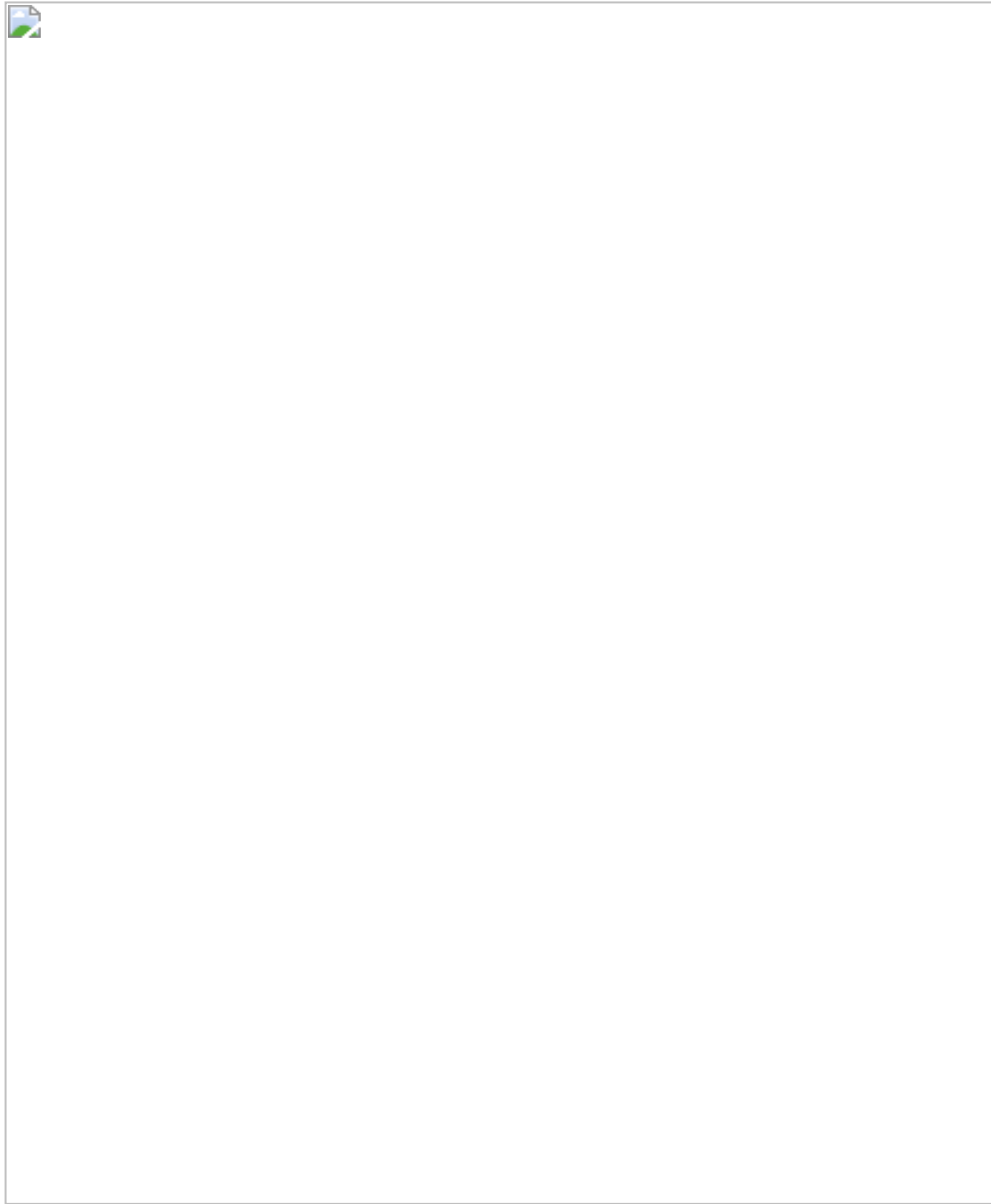
A good handshake for you and your wife.

Ever yours, Vincent

When I wrote that one must not forget to appreciate what is good in those who are not impressionists, I didn't mean exactly that I wanted to urge you to an unbounded admiration of the Salon, but I was thinking of a lot of men like Jourdan for example, who has just died at Avignon, of Antigna, Feyen-Perrin, all the people we used to know so well when we were younger. Why

forget them or why attach no importance to their equals? Why aren't Daubigny and Quost and Jeannin colourists, for instance?

So many distinctions in impressionism have not the importance that people have chosen to see in them.

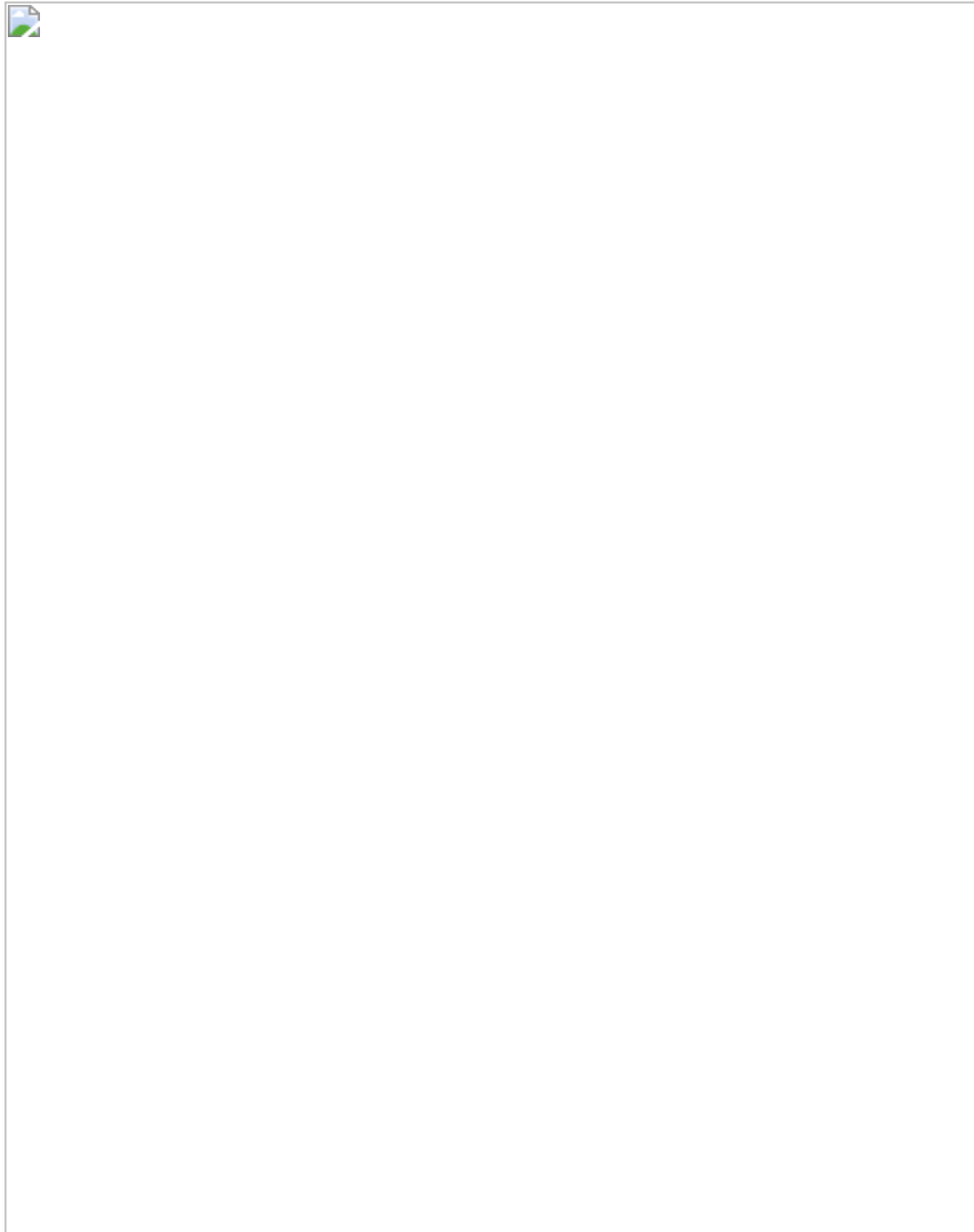


237. *Self-Portrait*,  
Arles, December 1888. Oil on canvas,  
46 x 38 cm. Private Collection.

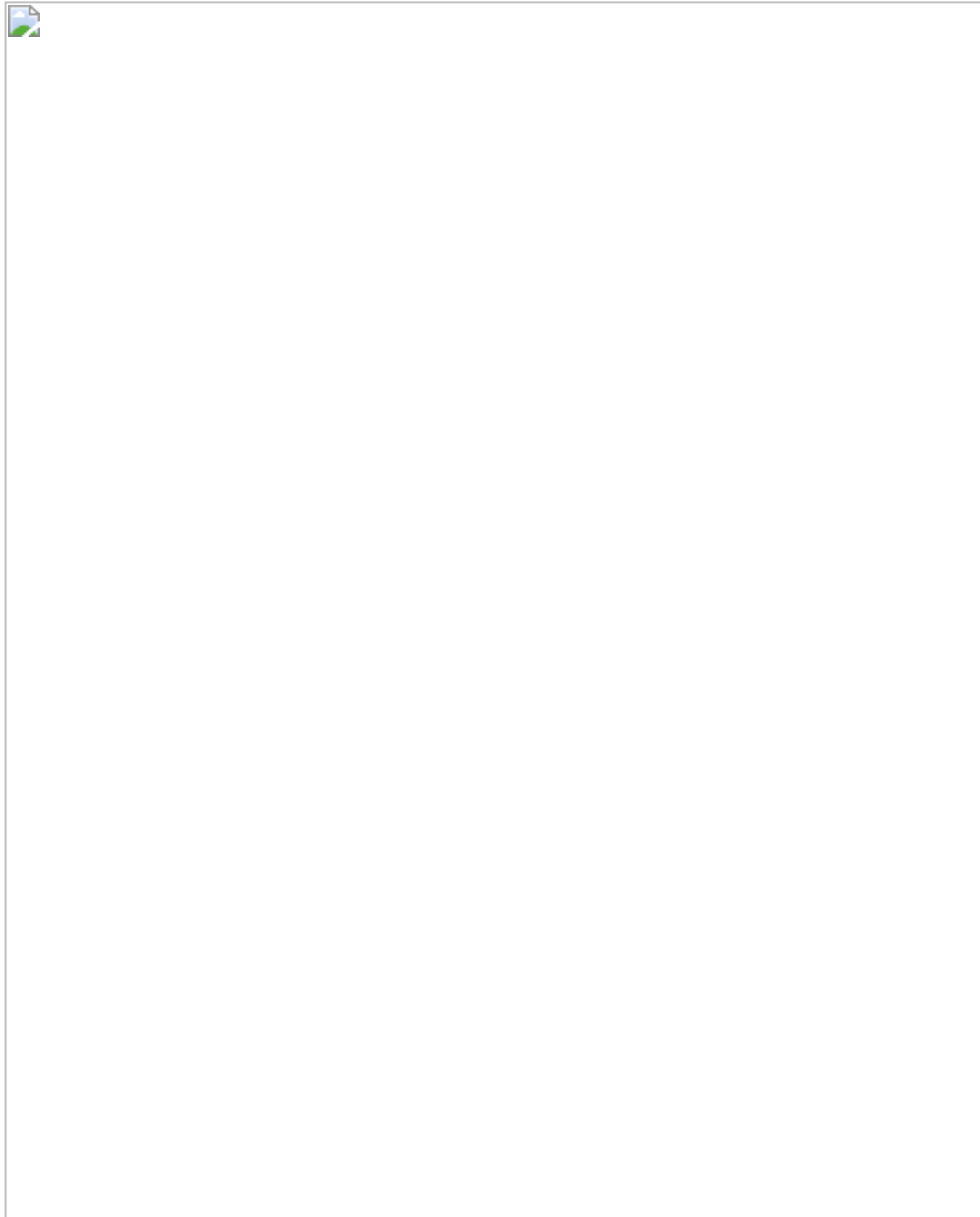


238. *Portrait of Madame Augustine Roulin*,  
Arles, November-December 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 55 x 65 cm.  
Oskar Reinhart Collection "Am Römerholz", Winterthur.





239. *Portrait of Madame Augustine Roulin and Baby Marcelle*,  
Arles, December 1888.  
Oil on canvas, 92.4 x 73.3 cm.  
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.



240. *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear and Pipe*,  
Arles, January 1889. Oil on canvas,  
51 x 45 cm. Private Collection, Chicago.

Crinolines had something pretty about them and consequently good, but in the end the fashion was fortunately short-lived for all that. Not for some people.

And thus we shall always keep a sort of passion for impressionism, but I feel that I return more and more to the ideas that I already had before I came to Paris.

Now that you are married, we don't have to live for great ideas any longer, but, believe me, for small ones only. And I find that a wonderful relief, and don't complain of it at all.

In my room I have the famous "Portrait of a Man" - the wood engraving which you know - a "Tangerine" by Monorobu (the big plate in Bing's sketchbook), the "Blade of Grass" (from the same book), the "Pietà" and the "Good Samaritan" by Delacroix, and the "Reader" by Meissonier, and then two big reed pen drawings. Just now I am reading Balzac's *Médecin de Campagne*, which is splendid; there is a character of a woman in it, not mad but too sensitive, which is very attractive; I will send it to you when I have finished it. They have lots of room here in the hospital, there would be enough to make studios for a score or so of painters.

I really must make up my mind, it is only too true that lots of painters go mad, it is a life that makes you, to say the least, very absent-minded. If I throw myself fully into my work again, very good, but I shall always be cracked.

If I could enlist for five years, I should recover considerably and be more rational and more master of myself.

But one way or the other, it's all the same to me.

I hope that there will be some canvases in the batch I have sent you which may give you some pleasure. If I go on being a painter, then sooner or later I shall probably be in Paris again, and I promise myself in that case to give some old canvases a good overhaul.

What is Gauguin doing? Am putting off writing him again until I am quite normal, but I often think of him and I should so much like to know if everything is going comparatively well with him.

If I had not been in such a hurry, if I had kept my studio, then this summer I should have touched up all the canvases I sent you. Of course, so long as the impasto isn't dry all the way through, you cannot scrape at it.

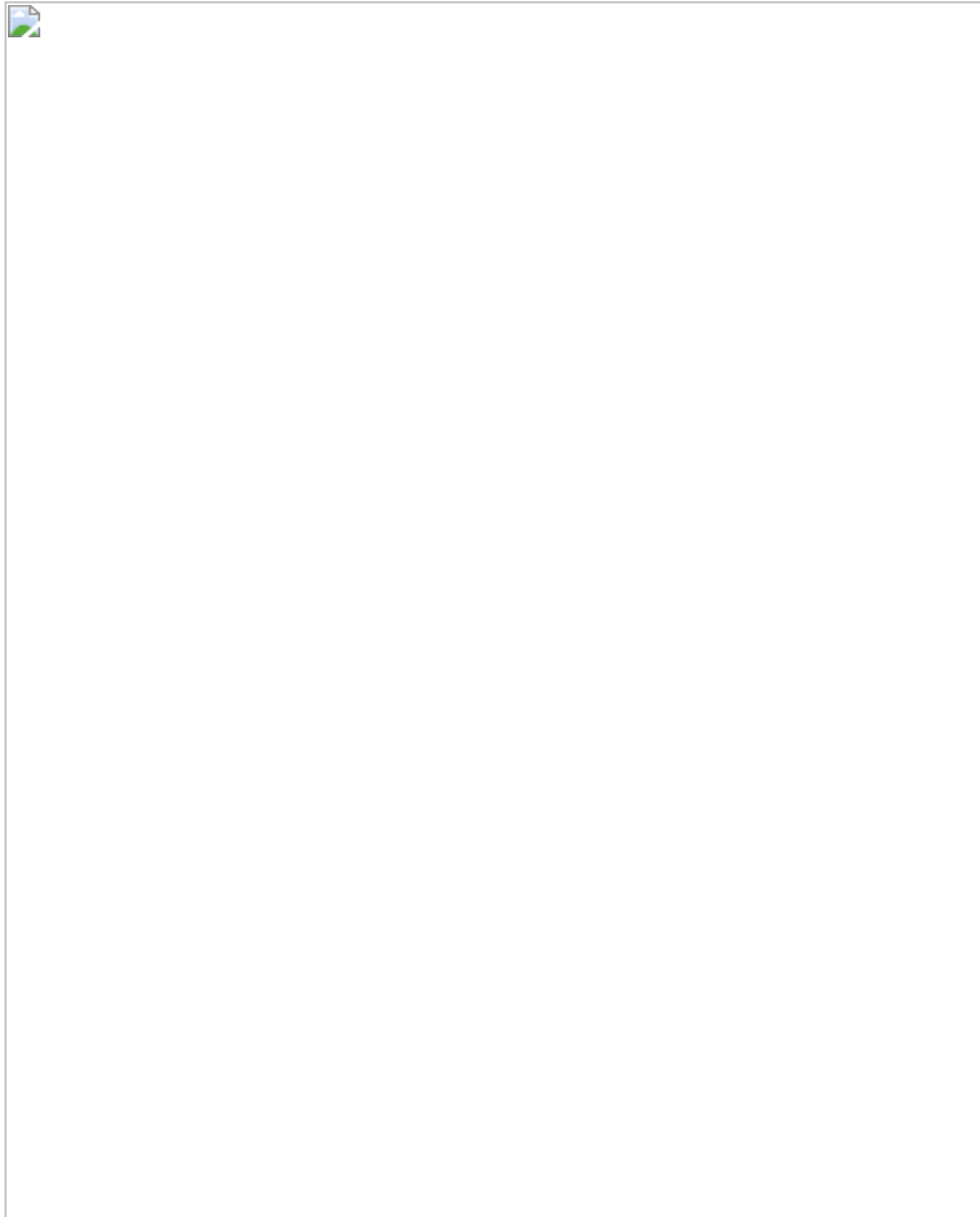
You will see that the expressions of the two women are different from the expressions one sees in Paris.

Is Signac back in Paris yet?

[\* Nickname for Napoleon III.]



241. *The Ward in the Hospital at Arles*,  
Arles, April 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 74 x 92 cm.  
Oskar Reinhart Collection "Am Römerholz", Winterthur.



242. *Hospital at Saint-Rémy*,  
Saint-Rémy, October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 90.2 x 73.3 cm.  
Armand Hammer Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

## Saint-Rémy: 1889-1890

### ***“What is the good of getting better?”***

On May 8th, 1889, Pastor Salles took van Gogh to the mental hospital in Saint-Rémy, thirty kilometers from Arles. One week later, van Gogh wrote to Theo:

“I wanted to tell you that I think I have done well to come here; first of all, by seeing the reality of the life of the various madmen and lunatics in this menagerie, I am losing the vague dread, the fear of the thing. And little by little I can come to look upon madness as a disease like any other. Then the change of surroundings does me good, I think. As far as I can make out, the doctor here is inclined to consider that I have had some sort of epileptic attack.”[\[114\]](#)

The vague dread, or ‘nameless fear’ – an expression used by van Gogh – disappeared as soon as the illness had a name:

“I really think that once you know what it is, once you are conscious of your condition and of being subject to attacks, then you can do something yourself to prevent your being taken unawares by the suffering or the terror.”[\[115\]](#)

Van Gogh himself led Dr. Rey to believe that there was a history of epileptic attacks in his family. The doctor in Saint-Rémy accepted this diagnosis of his new patient without question. More recently, however, scholars have found no indication that any of van Gogh’s relatives were in fact epileptic. That the diagnosis was false finally did not matter very much: the treatment at Saint-Rémy was the same for all patients. They were bathed regularly; otherwise they were left on their own:

“As these poor souls do absolutely nothing (not a book, nothing to distract them but a game of bowls and a game of checkers) they have no other daily distraction than to stuff themselves with chickpeas, beans, lentils, and other groceries and merchandise from the colonies in fixed quantities and at regular hours.”[\[116\]](#)

At the beginning, van Gogh was impressed by the community of the sick, which seemed to him, in some parts, more human than the community of the healthy:

“For though there are some who howl or rave continually, there is much real friendship here among them; they say we must put up with others so that others will put up with us, and other very sound arguments, which they really put into practice. And among ourselves we understand each other very well. For instance I can sometimes chat with one of them who can only answer in incoherent sounds, because he is not afraid of me.”[\[117\]](#)

For the first time, van Gogh felt that he was a part of the hospital community, but, in contrast with the other patients, he did not succumb to lethargy. Since he felt a duty to work, he started painting as soon as he arrived. He asked Theo to send him canvases and colours, along with a statement indicating how



much he would have to produce in order to ‘pay’ for his stay. For the art dealer, this must have been a naïve delusion – Theo hadn’t sold one of his brother’s pictures. Nevertheless, he bought all of the necessary materials and sent them to Saint-Rémy.

During his stay in the hospital, van Gogh painted landscapes, in which he recreated the world of his childhood anew. At the same time, he continued to study the effects of colours:

“Only I have no news to tell you, for the days are all the same, I have no ideas, except to think that a field of wheat or a cypress is well worth the trouble of looking at close up, and so on. I have a wheat field, very yellow and very light, perhaps the lightest canvas I have done. The cypresses are always occupying my thoughts, I should like to make something of them like the canvases of the sunflowers, because it astonishes me that they have not yet been done as I see them. It is as beautiful of line and proportion as an Egyptian obelisk. And the green has a quality of such distinction. It is a splash of black in a sunny landscape, but it is one of the most interesting black notes, and the most difficult to hit off exactly what I can imagine. But then you must see them against the blue, in the blue rather. To paint nature here, as everywhere, you must be in it for a long time.”[\[118\]](#)

During the first months, the orderly life at the hospital seemed to have a positive effect on the painter. In his letters, he stressed that he only wished to work, and that he was not missing his friends. But then, one day in July, he was working in an open field when he suffered another attack, and for many days afterwards his “*mind [was] absolutely wandering.*”[\[119\]](#)

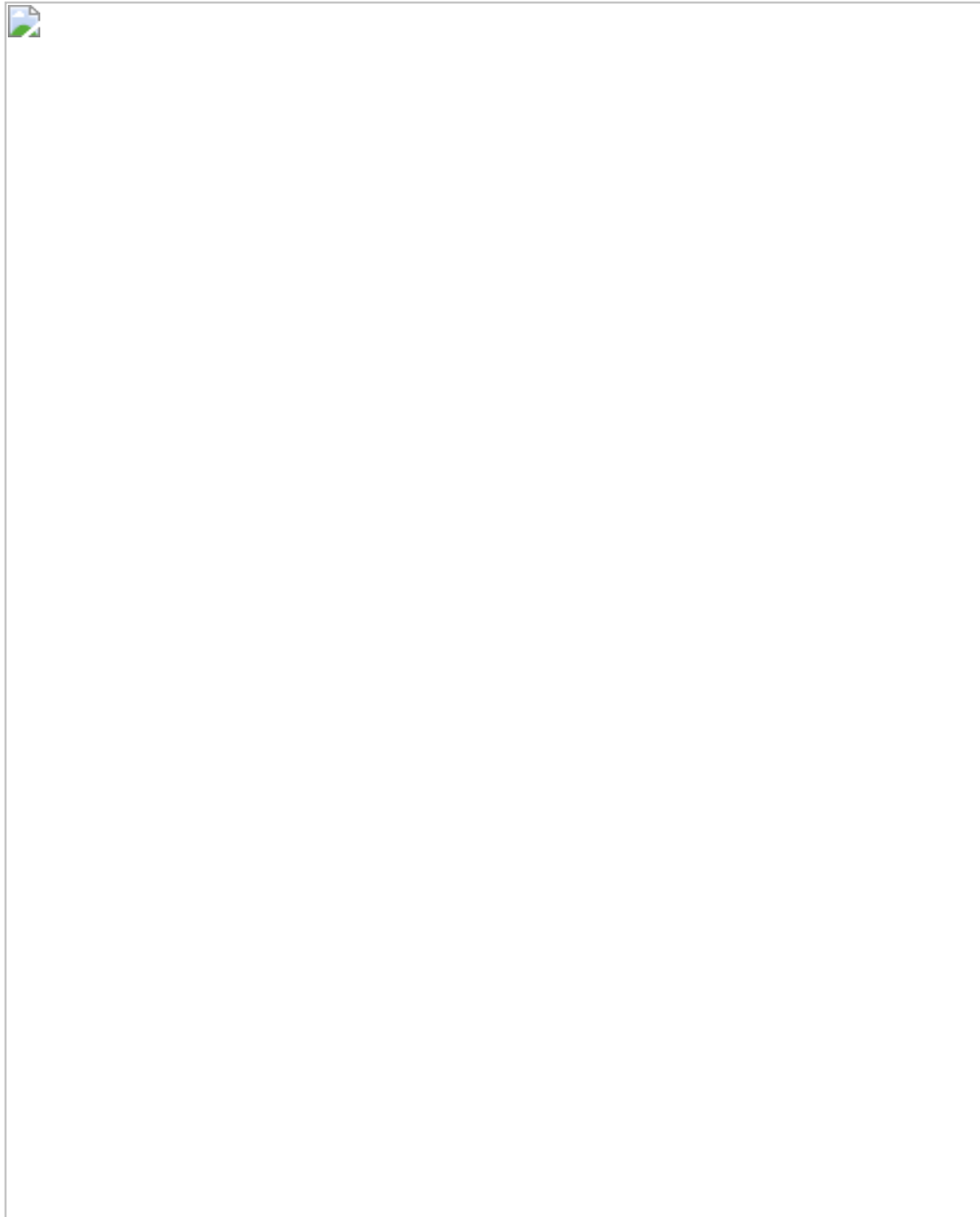
During this state of confusion, he might have tried to commit suicide by drinking paint or turpentine. After the crisis had subsided, Dr. Théophile Peyron informed Theo that his brother’s brain was clear again and that all thoughts of suicide had disappeared. Van Gogh again returned to his work, but his view of the hospital life had changed. The other patients, who had previously appeared to form an ideal community, now frightened him. Worse, the nuns who worked in Saint-Rémy terrified him.

He realised that his attacks tended “to take an absurd religious turn,” and he was annoyed “to see these good women who believe in the Virgin of Lourdes, and made up things like that, and [I think that] I am a prisoner under an administration, which very willingly fosters these sickly religious aberrations, whereas the right thing would be to cure them.”

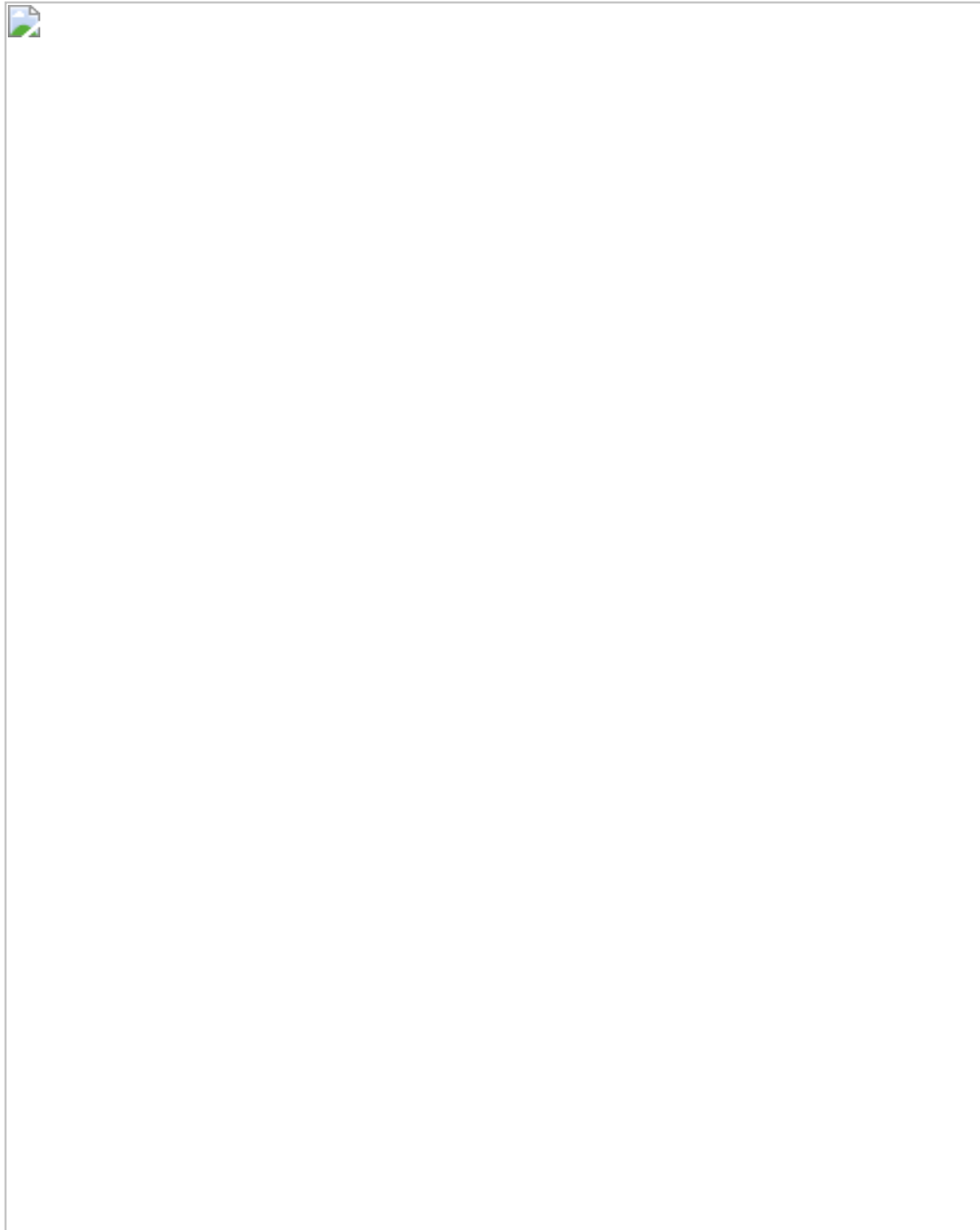
Comparing the last attack with the first crisis in Arles, van Gogh decided that his illness seemed “to be caused more by some outside influence than by something within myself. I may be mistaken, but however it may be, I think you will feel it quite right that I have rather a horror of all religious exaggeration.”[\[120\]](#) After the attack, van Gogh would no longer leave the hospital to paint outdoors. It therefore became difficult for him to find subjects for his work. As an alternative, he took himself as a model or copied one of the prints Theo had sent him from Paris.

He ‘repainted’ the *Pièta* by Delacroix and *Prisoners’ Round* by Gustave Doré. A few weeks before he had asked himself: “What is the good of getting better?”[\[121\]](#); now he had only one aim: “to recover like a man who meant to commit suicide and, finding the water too cold, tries to regain the bank.”[\[122\]](#) Suddenly, he felt “a terrible desire... to see my friends and the northern countryside again.”[\[123\]](#)

Van Gogh remained in the South for eight more months, chiefly because Theo didn't give him a clear sign to come to Paris. Theo's wife Johanna was pregnant, and van Gogh had to wait until the child was born and until his brother had found a doctor for him. When Dr. Paul Gachet, a well-known art lover who lived in Auvers-sur-Oise near Paris, agreed to treat the painter, van Gogh left Saint-Rémy. On May 16th, 1890 Dr. Peyron closed the record with a final note: 'cured.'



243. *Trees in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospice,*  
Saint-Rémy, October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm.  
Private Collection, United States.



244. *The Garden of the Asylum at Saint-Rémy*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 95 x 75.5 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, c. 10-15 May 1889**

My dear Theo,

Thanks for your letter. You are absolutely right when you say that M. Salles has been splendid in all of this, I am under the greatest obligation to him.

I want to tell you that I think I have done well to come here, because, by seeing the reality of the assorted madmen and lunatics in this menagerie, I am losing my vague dread, my fear of the thing. And bit by bit I am getting to consider that madness is just a disease like any other. Thus the change in surroundings will do me good, I think.

As far as I can tell, the doctor here is of the opinion that what I have had is some sort of epileptic attack. But I haven't asked him more about it.

Have you received the case of paintings, I am curious to know if they have suffered, yes or no?

I have two more on the go - violet irises and a lilac bush, two subjects taken from the garden.

The idea of my duty to get back to work occurs to me a lot and I believe that all my faculties for work will soon come back to me. It's just that the work often absorbs me so much that I think that for the rest of my life I will always be a bit absent-minded and awkward when shifting for myself.

I won't write you a long letter - I want to try to reply to my new sister's letter, which moved me very much, but I don't know if I'll be able to do it.

A handshake,

Ever yours, Vincent

My dear sister,

Many thanks for your letter in which I especially looked for news of my brother. And I find it excellent. I see you have already noticed that he likes Paris, and this more or less surprises you, since you do not like it at all, or rather like mostly the flowers there, such as the wisterias, I suppose, which are probably coming into bloom.

Might it not be a fact that when you are fond of something, you see it better and more truly than when you are not fond of it? For him and me Paris is certainly already something like a graveyard where many artists have perished whom we once knew directly or indirectly.

Certainly Millet, whom you will learn to like very much, and many others with him, tried to get out of Paris. But as for Eugene Delacroix, for instance, it is difficult to imagine him, as a man, otherwise than as a Parisian.

All this is to urge you - with all caution it is true - to believe in the possibility that there are homes in Paris and not just apartments.

Anyway - fortunately you are yourself his home.

It is rather queer perhaps that the result of this terrible attack is that there is hardly any very definite desire or hope left in my mind, and I wonder if this is the way one thinks when, with the passions lessened, one descends the hill instead of climbing it. And anyhow, my sister, if you can believe, or almost believe, that everything is always for the best in the best of worlds, then perhaps you will also be able to believe that Paris is the best of the cities in it.

Have you noticed that the old cab horses there have large beautiful eyes, as heartbroken as Christians sometimes have? However it may be, we are neither savages nor peasants, and it is perhaps even a duty to like civilization (so called). After all it would probably be hypocrisy to say or think that Paris is bad when one is living there. Besides, the first time one sees Paris, it may be that everything in it seems unnatural, foul and sad.

Anyway, if you do not like Paris, above all do not like painting or those who are directly or indirectly concerned in it, for it is only too doubtful whether it is beautiful or useful.

But what is to be done? - there are people who love nature even though they are cracked or ill, those are the painters; then there are those who like what is made by men's hands, and these even go so far as to like pictures.

Though here there are some patients very seriously ill, the fear and horror of madness that I used to have has already lessened a great deal. And though here you continually hear terrible cries and howls like beasts in a menagerie, in spite of that people get to know each other very well and help each other when their attacks come on. When I am working in the garden, they all come to look, and I assure you they have the discretion and manners to leave me alone - more than the good people of the town of Arles, for instance.

It may well be that I shall stay here long enough - I have never been so peaceful as here and in the hospital in Arles - to be able to paint a little at last. Quite near here there are some little mountains, grey and blue, and at their foot some very, very green cornfields and pines.

I shall count myself very happy if I can manage to work enough to earn my living, for it worries me a lot when I think that I have done so many pictures and drawings without ever selling one. Do not be in too much of a hurry to think that this is an injustice. I myself don't know in the least.

Thanking you again for having written to me. I am so very glad to think that now my brother is not going home to an empty apartment when he goes back in the evening.

I shake your hand in thought, and believe me,

Your brother, Vincent

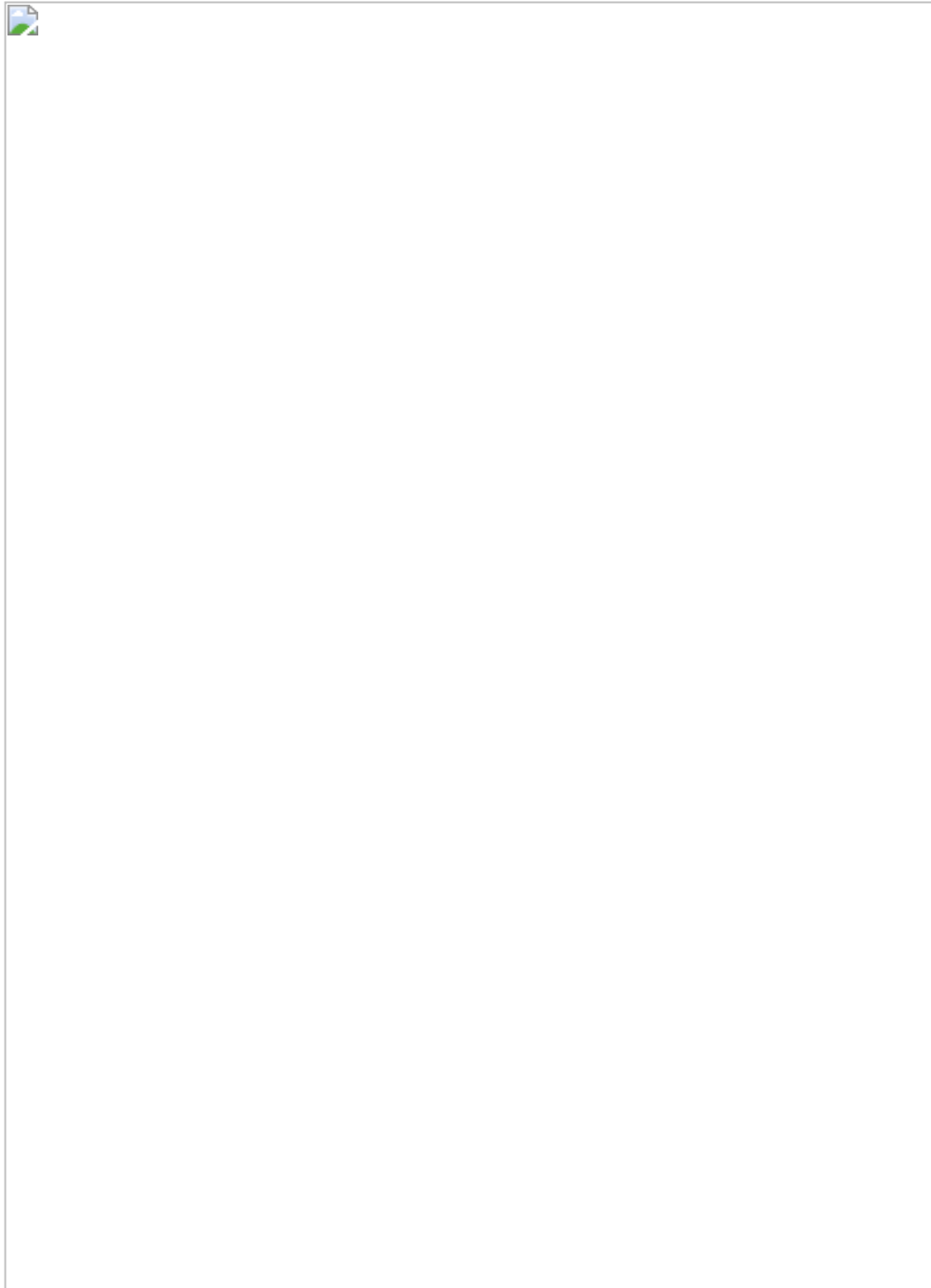




245. *The Garden of the Hospital in Arles*,  
Saint-Rémy, April-May 1889.  
Pencil and sepia, 45.4 x 59 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



246. *The Roadmenders*,  
Saint-Rémy, November 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 71 x 93 cm.  
The Philips Collection, Washington, D.C.



247. *Trees with a Figure in the Garden of Saint-Paul Hospital,*  
Saint-Rémy, October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 63 x 48 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



248. *Sorrowing Old Man ("At Eternity's Gate")*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 21 May 1889**

Paris, 22 May 1889

My dear Vincent,

Many thanks for your letter; Jo too is very pleased with the one you wrote her. We hear with pleasure that your trip to St. Rémy was accomplished without a hitch, and that your stay there will not last very long, for it can hardly be pleasant to be near so many lunatics. What I should like is to be able to find people somewhere who would be able to take care of you, and would leave you entirely at liberty otherwise. Surely something like this might be found. If you don't have such a dread of going back to Paris or its environs, I myself would try to find a boarding house of this kind.

Please tell us in your next letter what you think of the establishment where you are now staying. How are you treated, do you get enough food, and what is the behaviour of the people you have to do with? Do you see anything of the countryside? Above all, don't harass yourself, either physically or mentally, because for the moment it is better to do everything in your power to regain your strength. Working will come of itself after that.

Some days ago I got your consignment, which is very important; there are superb things in it. Everything arrived in good condition and without any damage. The cradle, the portrait of Roulin, the little sower with the tree, the baby, the starry night, the sunflowers and the chair with the pipe and tobacco pouch are the ones I prefer so far.

The first two are very curious. Certainly there is none of the beauty which is taught officially in them, but they have something so striking and so near to truth. Who can tell whether we are more in the right than the simple people who buy pictures with glaring colours? Or rather, isn't it a fact that the charm they see in them is also an inspired sensation, as much as that of the pretentious fellows who look at pictures in museums? Now there is in your canvases a vigour which one certainly does not find in the chromos; in the course of time they will become very beautiful by reason of the settling of the layers of paint and they will undoubtedly be appreciated someday. When we see that the Pissarros, the Gauguins, the Renoirs, the Guillaumins do not sell, one ought to be almost glad of not having the public's favour, seeing that those who have it now will not have it forever, and it is quite

possible that times will change very shortly. If you could see how feeble the Salon and the Universal Exhibition are with regard to the pictures, I think you would be of the opinion that they will not last much longer. The Dutch school cuts a very good figure beside them.

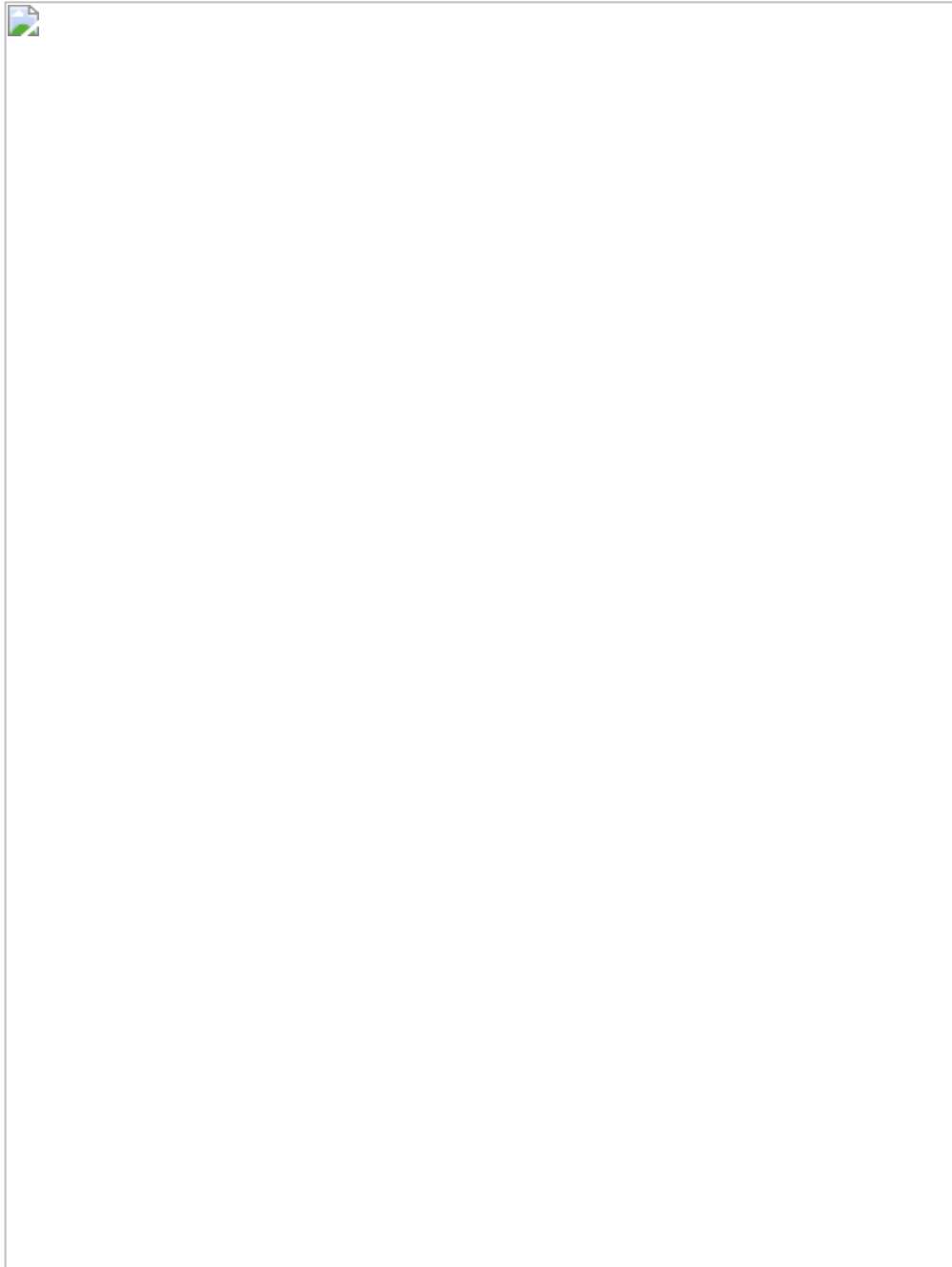
There are two watercolours by J.H. Weissenbruch of which I am particularly fond, also pieces by Willem and Jacob Maris and Bosboom, Israëls and Breitner. One of the Weissenbruchs is a mill on the bank of a canal, a blue sky with a little cloud hiding the sun. The other is a canal at night with boats in the moonlight. He is a thundering good artist, that one, but Tersteeg says he isn't saleable.

Not long ago I saw Gauguin, who is now working at sculpting. Within a short time he will go to Pont-Aven, where De Haan is staying already. It seems that before long there will be an exhibition of the Independents; I should like very much to know what you think of it, and which canvases you think are most suitable to be shown. I hear tell that everyone can exhibit four canvases, as there is not enough room to admit more.

I shall write again soon, and you write me too if you are feeling well.

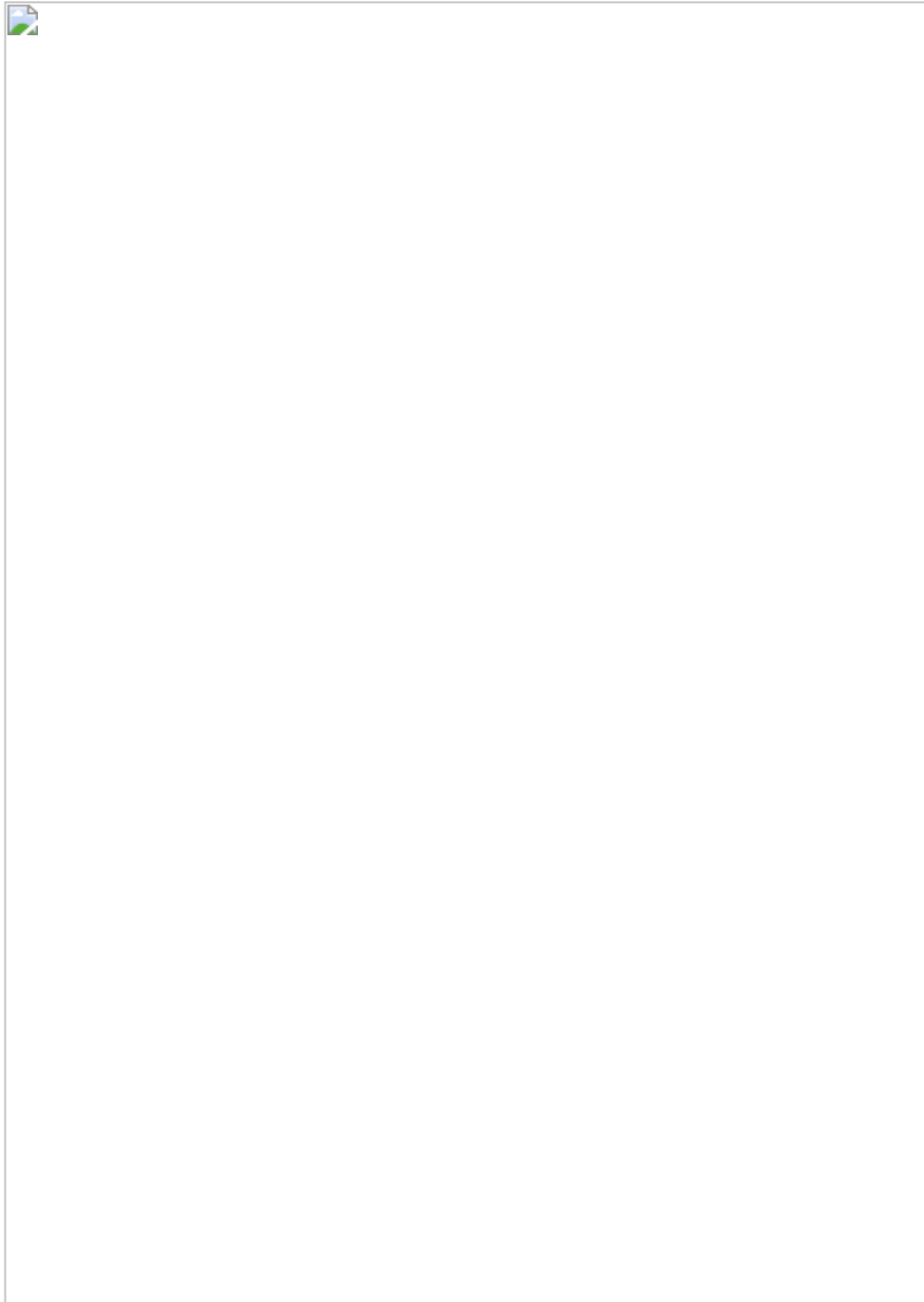
A cordial handshake,

Yours, Theo



249. *Portrait of Trabuc, an Attendant at Saint-Paul Hospital,*  
Saint-Rémy, September 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 61 x 46 cm.  
Kunstmuseum Solothurn,  
Dübi-Müller Foundation, Solothurn.





250. *Portrait of a Patient in Saint-Paul Hospital*,  
Saint-Rémy, October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 32.5 x 23.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh  
Saint-Rémy, 7 or 8 September 1889**

My dear Theo,

I think what you say in your letter is quite right, that Rousseau and artists such as Bodmer are in any case men, and that one would want the world to be peopled with men like them - indeed, yes, that's how I feel as well.

And that J. H. Weissenbruch knows and does the muddy towpaths, the stunted willows, the foreshortenings & the skilful & strange perspectives of the canals, as Daumier does the lawyers, I think that's perfect. Tersteeg has done well to buy some of his work. The reason people like that don't sell is, I think, because there are too many dealers trying to sell other things with which they deceive & mislead the public.

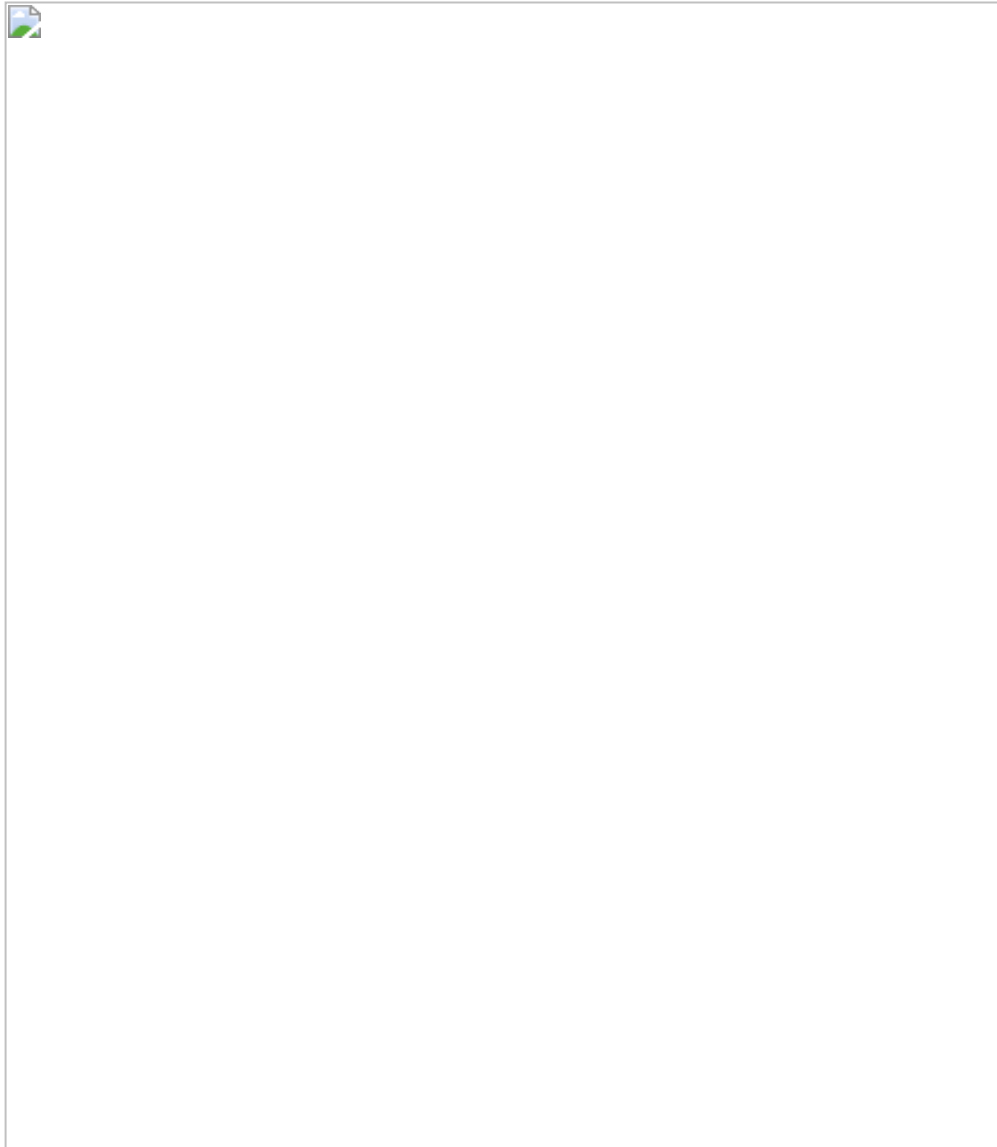
Do you know that even today, when I chance upon the story of some energetic industrialist, or even more of some publisher, I still feel the same indignation, the same rage as I used to when I was with G. & Co.

Life passes in this way, time does not return, but I am working furiously for the very reason that I know that opportunities for work do not recur.

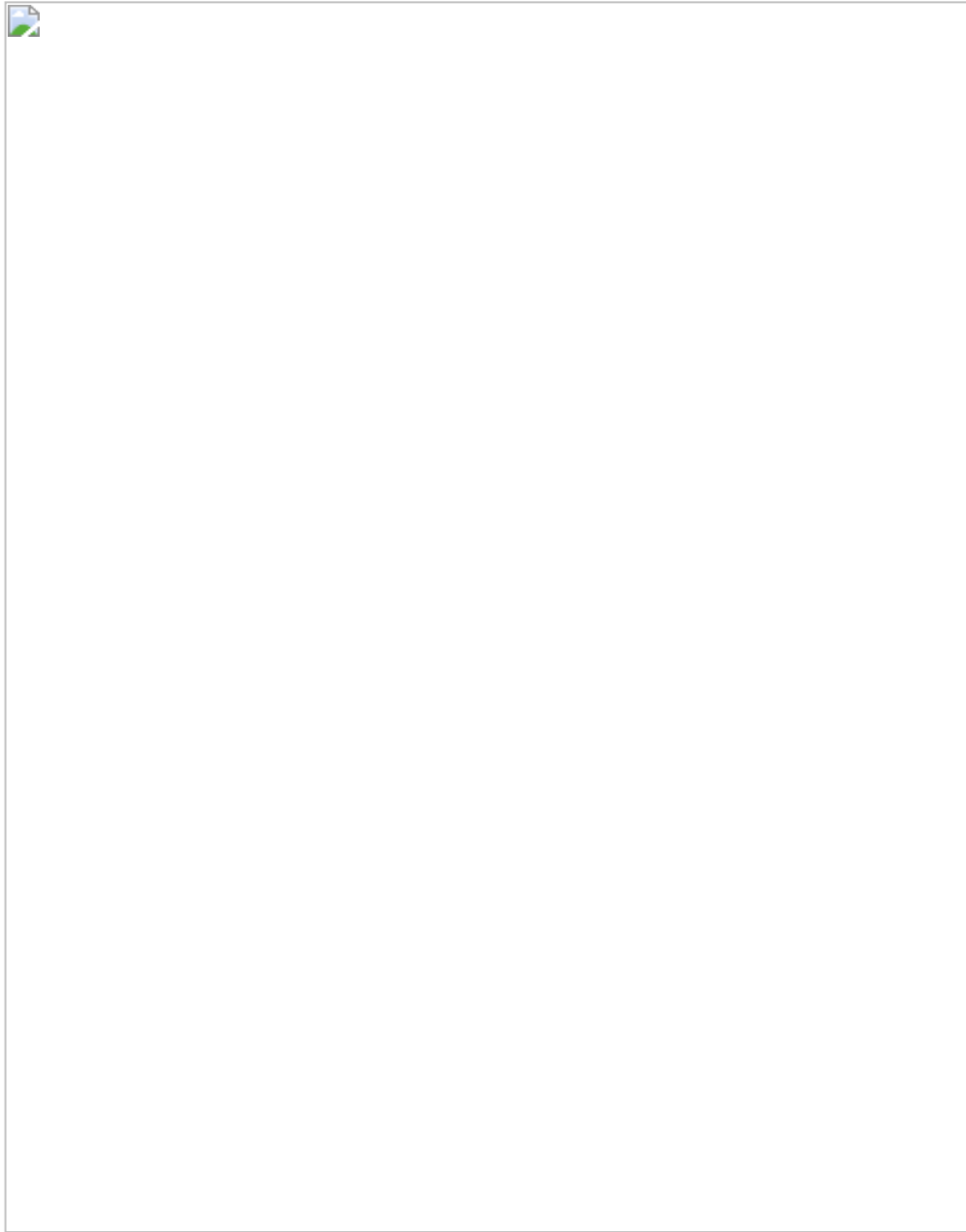
Especially in my case, where a more violent attack could destroy my ability to paint for good.

During the attacks I feel cowardly in the face of the pain and suffering - more cowardly than is justified - and perhaps it is this moral cowardice itself, which previously I had no desire to cure, that now makes me eat for two, work hard, and limit my relations with the other patients for fear of falling ill again - in short, I am trying to recover, like someone who has meant to commit suicide, but then makes for the bank because he finds the water too cold.

My dear brother, you know that I came to the south and threw myself into work for a thousand reasons - looking for a different light, believing that observing nature under a brighter sky might give one a more accurate idea of the way the Japanese feel and draw. Wanting, finally, to see this stronger sun, because one has the feeling that unless one knows it one would not be able to understand the pictures of Delacroix, as far as execution and technique are concerned, and because one feels that the colours of the prism are veiled in the mists of the north.



251. *Self-Portrait*,  
Saint-Rémy, September 1889. Oil on canvas,  
51 x 45 cm. Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.



252. *Self-Portrait*,  
Saint-Rémy, September 1889. Oil on canvas,  
40 x 31 cm. Private Collection, Switzerland.

All this remains more or less true. Then if one adds that heartfelt leaning towards the south Daudet described in *Tartarin*, and the fact that from time to time I have also found friends and things to love here, then you will understand that however horrible I find my illness, I have the feeling that I have formed ties here that are a little too strong - ties which could later make me long to come back and work here again. Despite all this it could be that I shall be returning to the north fairly soon.

Yes, for I shall not conceal from you that in the same way that I am at present eating ravenously, so I have a terrible craving to see my friends again and the countryside of the north.

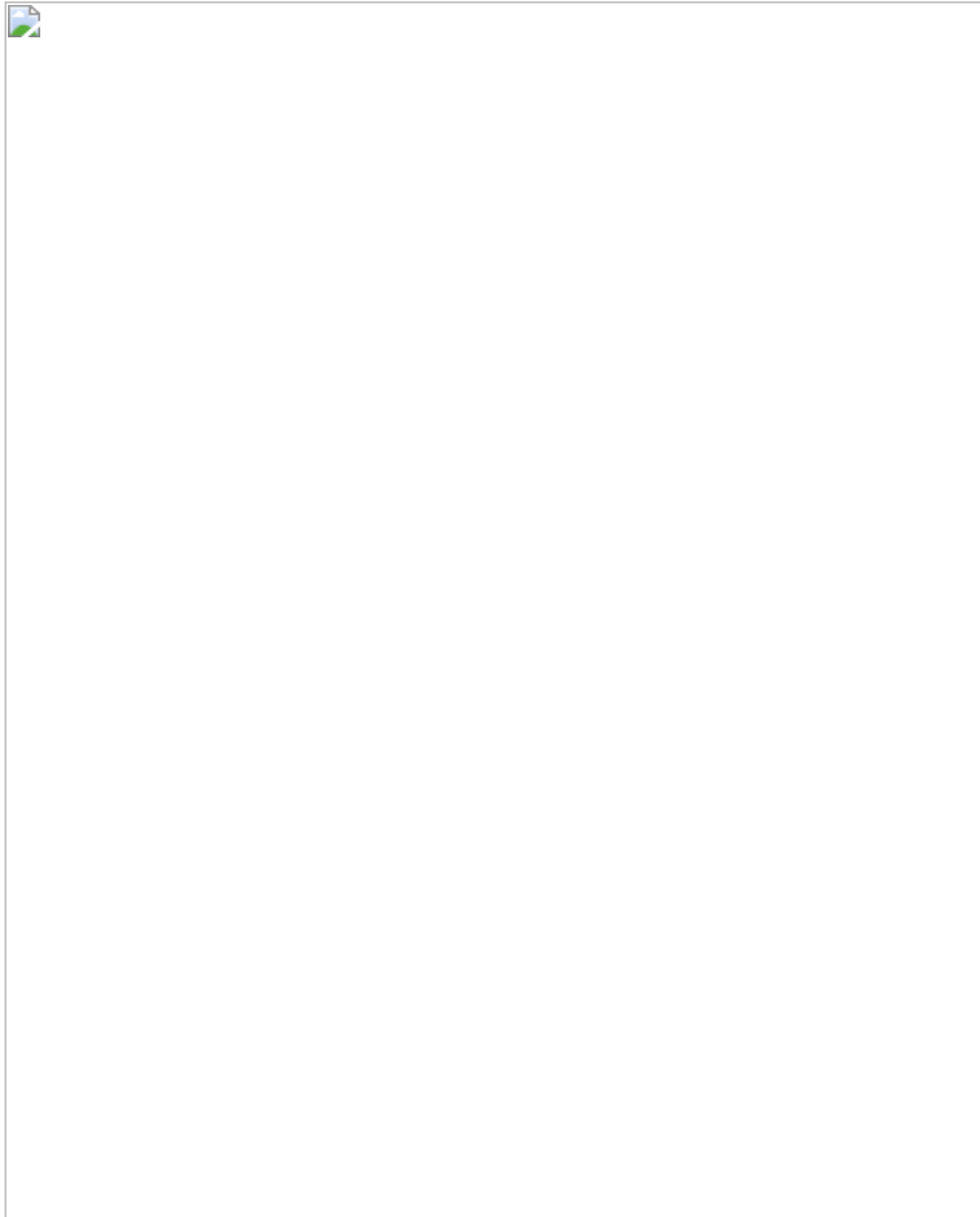
Work is going very well, I am discovering things I have sought in vain for years, and, aware of that, I am constantly reminded of that saying of Delacroix's you know, that he discovered painting when he had neither breath nor teeth left. Oh well, with my mental illness, I think of so many other artists suffering mentally, and tell myself that it doesn't stop one from carrying on one's trade as painter as if nothing had gone wrong.

When I see that here the attacks tend to take an absurdly religious turn, I might almost believe that this actually necessitates a return to the north. Don't say too much about it to the doctor when you see him - but I don't know whether it comes from living so many months both at the hospital in Arles and here in these old cloisters. In fact, I really shouldn't live in such surroundings, the street would be better. I am not indifferent, and even as I suffer, religious thoughts sometimes give me great consolation. I had a piece of bad luck this last time during my illness - that lithograph of Delacroix's, *La Pietà* along with some other sheets, fell into some oil and paint and was ruined.

I was very sad about it - so I have been busy painting it and you will see it one day on a size five or six canvas. I have made a copy of it which I think has some feeling. Besides, having seen *Daniel* and *Les Odalisques* and the portrait of Bruyas and *La mulâtresse* *Mulâtresse* in Montpellier not long ago, I am still under the impression they made on me.

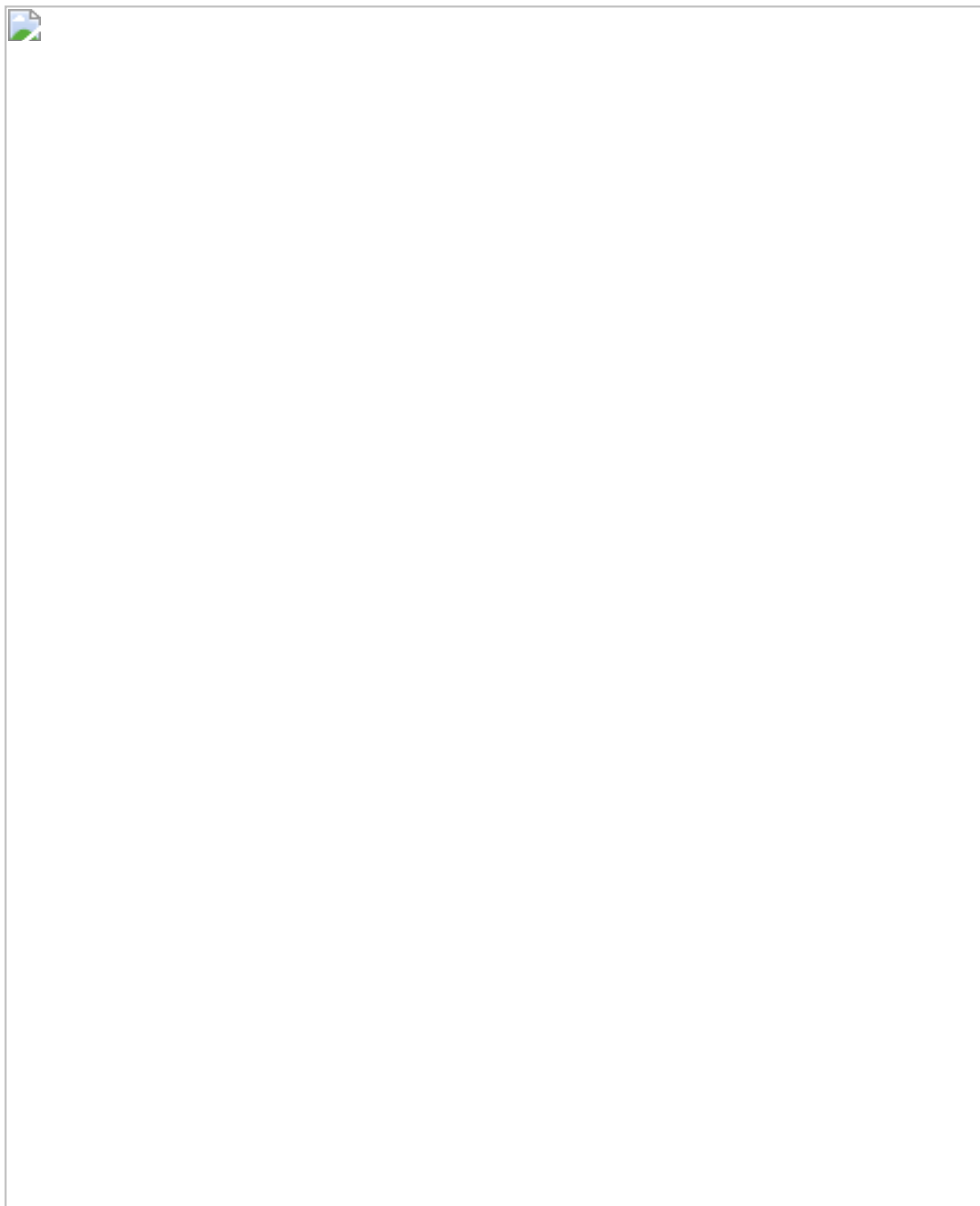
That is what uplifts me, and also reading a fine book such as one by Beecher Stowe or by Dickens. But what disturbs me is the constant sight of these good women, who both believe in the Virgin of Lourdes and make up that sort of thing, and realizing that one is a prisoner of an administration that is only too willing to cultivate these unhealthy religious aberrations

when it should be concerned with curing them. So I say again, better to go, if not into penal servitude, at least into the army.



253. *Self-Portrait*,  
Saint-Rémy, September 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54.5 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.





254. *Portrait of Madame Ginoux (L'Arlésienne)*,  
Saint-Rémy, early February-February 20, 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 65 x 54 cm.  
Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand, São Paulo.

I reproach myself with my cowardice, I ought to have defended my studio better, even if it meant coming to blows with the gendarmes and the neighbours. Others would have used a revolver in my place, and had one killed gawking idiots like that, as an artist one would certainly have been acquitted. It would have been better had I done that, but I was cowardly and drunk - ill too, but I wasn't brave.

I'm also very frightened in the face of the suffering brought on by these attacks, and so I don't know if my zeal is anything other than what I said, it is like that of someone who means to commit suicide, but then struggles for the shore because he finds the water too cold.

But listen, to be in board and lodgings as Braat was when I saw him that time - happily long ago - no, and no again. It would be different if old Pissarro or Vignon, for instance, would care to take me in. Well, I'm a painter myself - it could be arranged, and it would be better if the money went to feed painters than to the excellent nuns.

Yesterday I asked M. Peyron point blank, since you are going to Paris, what would you say if I suggested that you be kind enough to take me with you? His reply was evasive - that it was too sudden, that he would have to write to you beforehand.

But he is very kind and very indulgent towards me, and while he doesn't have the final say here, far from it, I have him to thank for many liberties.

After all, one shouldn't only make pictures, one should see people too, and every now and then, by associating with others, recuperate a little and stock up on new ideas.

I've abandoned any hope that it won't come back - on the contrary, we must face the fact that I will have an attack from time to time. But at those times I could go into an asylum or even into the town prison where they usually have an isolation cell.

Don't be anxious, in any case - the work is going well, and look, I don't need to tell you that I've still got a lot of things to do, wheat fields and such.

I've done the portrait of the attendant [Lost painting] and have got a copy of it for you. It makes a fairly curious contrast with the portrait I've done of myself, in which the look is vague and veiled, whereas he has a military air and small, lively, black eyes.

I have given it to him, and I'll do his wife as well, if she wants to pose. She is a woman whose looks have faded, a poor soul, resigned to her fate,

nothing out of the ordinary and so insignificant that I simply long to paint that dusty blade of grass. I talked to her sometimes when I was doing some olive trees behind their little house, and she told me then that she didn't believe I was ill - in fact, you would now say the same if you saw me working, my mind clear and my fingers so sure that I drew that Pieta by Delacroix without taking a single measurement, though there are those four hands and arms in the foreground - gestures and postures that are not exactly easy or simple.

Please send me the canvas soon, if at all possible, and I think I'm also going to need 10 more tubes of zinc white.

All the same, I'm sure that if one is brave then recovery comes from within, through the complete acceptance of suffering and death, and through the surrender of one's will and love of self.

But that's no good to me, I like to paint, to see people and things and everything that makes our life - artificial, if you like. Yes, real life would be something else, but I don't think I belong to that category of souls who are ready to live, and also ready to suffer, at any moment.

What an odd thing the touch, the stroke of the brush, is.

In the open air, exposed to the wind, to the sun, to people's curiosity, one works as best one can, one fills one's canvas regardless. Yet that is how one captures the true and the essential - the most difficult part. But when, after some time, one resumes the study and alters the brushstrokes in keeping with the objects - the result is without doubt more harmonious and pleasant to look at, and one can add whatever serenity and happiness one feels.

Ah, I shall never be able to convey my impressions of some of the figures I have seen here. Certainly, this is the new road, this road to the south, but men from the north find it difficult to follow. And I can already see myself one day in the future enjoying some small success, and missing the solitude and the anguish as I watched the reaper in the field below through the iron bars of my cell. It's an ill wind...

To succeed, to enjoy lasting good fortune, one must have a different temperament from mine. I shall never do what I could have done and ought to have wanted and pursued.



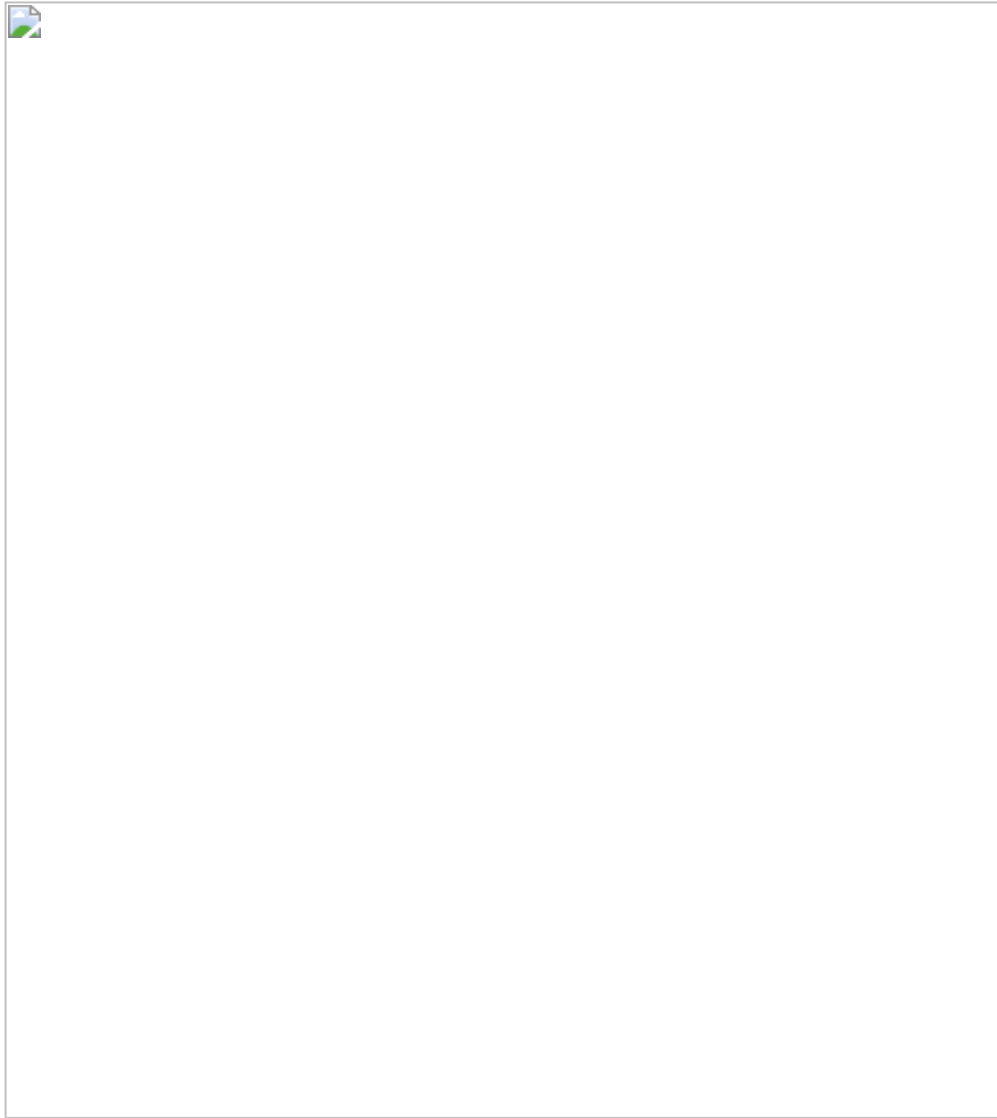
255. *Portrait of Madame Trabuc*,  
Saint-Rémy, September 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 63.7 x 48 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.



256. *Cypresses*,  
Saint-Rémy, June 1889.  
Ink and chalk on paper, 31 x 23 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Amsterdam.



257. *Cypress and Two Women*,  
Saint-Rémy, February 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 43.5 x 27 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



258. *The Promenade, Evening*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 12-15, 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 49.5 x 45.5 cm.  
Museu de Arte de São Paulo  
Assis Chateaubriand, São Paulo.



But, having these dizzy spells so often, I can never be more than fourth or fifth rate. Although I am well aware of the worth and originality and superiority of Delacroix or Millet, for example, I can still say, yes, I too am something, I too can achieve something. But I must take these artists as my starting point, and then produce the little I am capable of in the same way.

So old Pissarro has been dealt two cruel blows all at once. As soon as I read about it, I thought of asking you if there would be any way of going and staying with him. If you paid him the same as here, he would find it worth his while, for I don't need much - except for work. So ask him straight out, and if he doesn't like the idea, I could easily go and stay with Vignon.

I am a little afraid of Pont-Aven, there are so many people there. But what you say about Gauguin interests me very much. And I still tell myself that Gauguin and I will perhaps work together again. I know that G. can do even better things than he has done, but how to reassure him! I still hope to do his portrait.

Have you seen that portrait he did of me painting sunflowers? My face has certainly brightened up since then, but it was really me, extremely tired and charged with electricity as I was then.

Yet to see the country, one must live with the ordinary folk and in the cottages, the inns, etc. And I said that to Boch, who complained he had seen nothing that had tempted him or made an impression on him.

I walked around with him for two days, and I showed him how to do thirty pictures as different from the north as Morocco would be. I'd be curious to know what he's doing at the moment.

And then, do you know why Eugène Delacroix's pictures - the religious and historical pictures, *La Barque du Christ*, *La Pietà*, *Les Croisés*, - have this allure? Because Delacroix, when he did a Gethsemane, had been beforehand to see what an olive grove was like on the spot, and the same for the sea whipped up by a strong mistral, and because he must have said to himself, these people we know from history, doges of Venice, crusaders, apostles, holy women, were of the same type as, and lived in a similar way to, their present-day descendants.

And I must tell you, and you can see it in *La Berceuse*, however unsuccessful and feeble that attempt may be, if I had had the strength to continue, then I should have done portraits of saints and holy women from life which would have seemed to belong to another age, and they would have

been drawn from the bourgeoisie of today and yet would have had something in common with the very earliest Christians.



259. *The Starry Night*,  
Saint-Rémy, June 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The emotions that are aroused are, however, too strong, so I'll leave it at that - but later, later, I don't promise not to return to the charge. What a great man Fromentin was - he will always be the guide for any who wish to see the east. He, the first to establish a link between Rembrandt and the south, between Potter and what he himself saw.

You are right a thousand times over - I mustn't think about all that - to calm down I must do things - even if they're only studies of cabbages and lettuces, and after calming down, then - whatever I am capable of.

When I see them again, I'll do some copies of those studies of the Diligence of Tarascon, the Vineyard, the Harvest, and above all of the Red Tavern, that Night Café which is the most characteristic of all as far as colour is concerned. But the white figure in the middle must be done all over again for the colour, and better composed. Still, I'd go so far as to say that this is the real south, and a calculated combination of greens and reds.

My strength has been all too quickly exhausted, but in the distance I can see the possibility of others doing an infinite number of fine things. And again and again there is truth in the idea that to make the journey easier for others it would have been a good thing to set up a studio somewhere in this area.

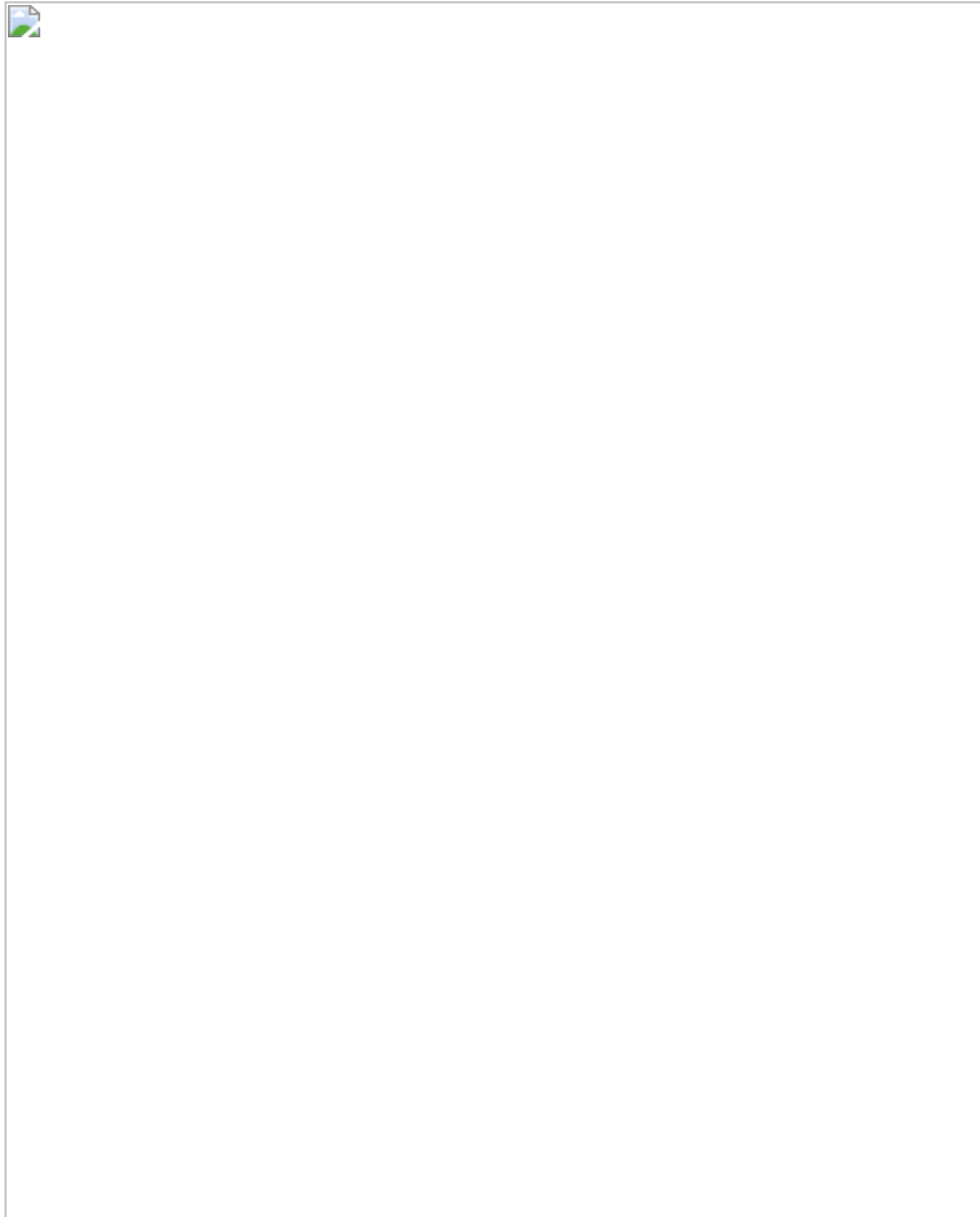
To make the journey in one go from the north to Spain, for example, is not a good thing, you will not see what you should see - you must get your eyes accustomed gradually to the different light.

I really don't need to see the Titians and Velasquezes in the galleries, I've seen so many types in the flesh that have given me a better picture of the south now than before my journey.

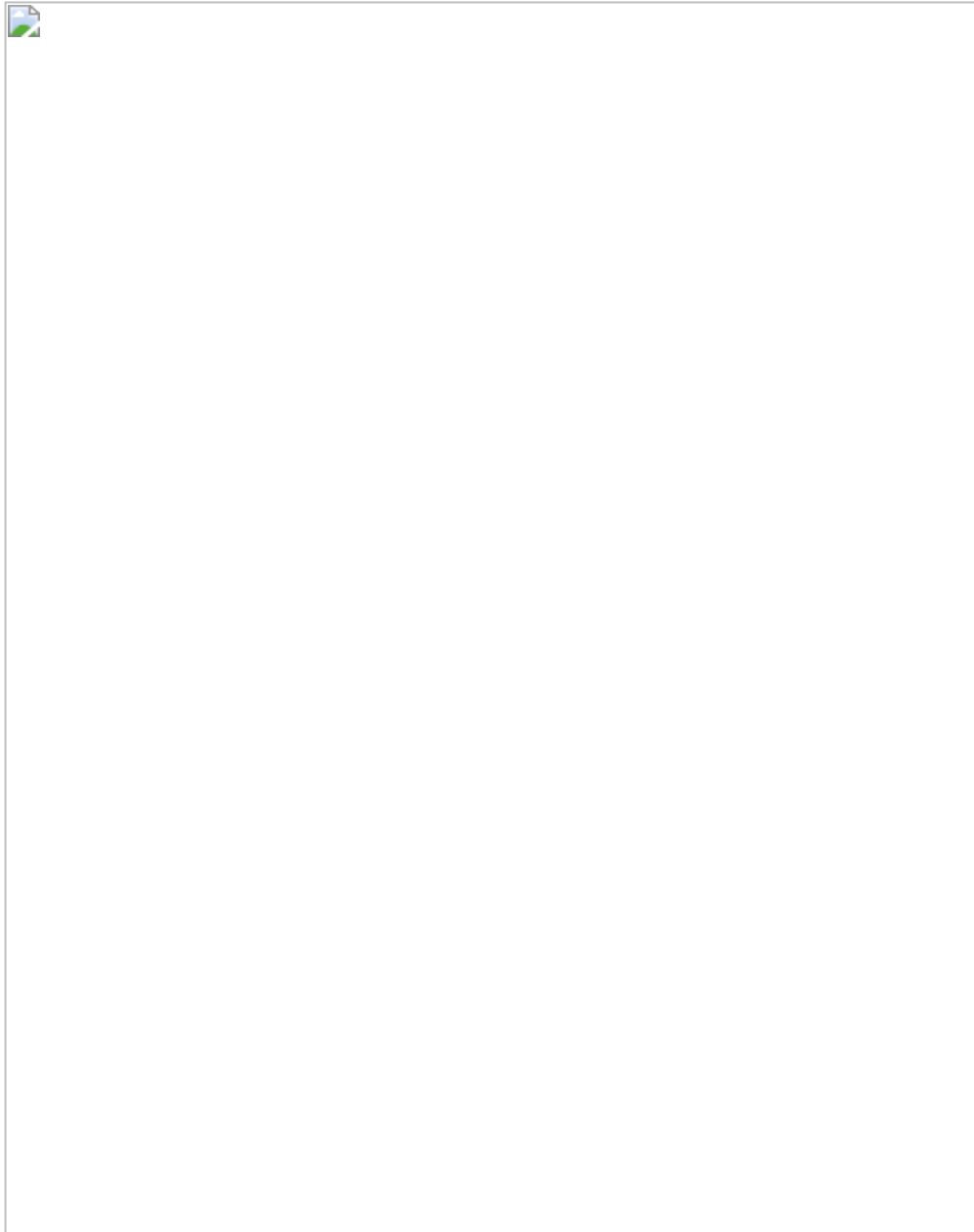
My God, my God, those good people among artists who say that Delacroix is not of the true east. Now look, is the true east what Parisians like Gérôme make of it? Because you paint a bit of sunny wall from nature, well and truly according to our northern way of seeing things, does that prove that you have seen the people of the east? That was what Delacroix was searching for, and it in no way prevented him from painting walls in La Noce Juive and Les Odalisques.

Isn't that true? - and then Degas says that it costs too much to drink in the taverns and paint pictures at the same time. I don't deny it, but would he rather I went into the cloisters or the churches? It is there that I myself get frightened. That's why I make a bid to escape with this letter.

With many handshakes for you and Jo,  
Ever yours, Vincent



260. *Still Life with Irises*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



261. *Iris*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1889.  
Oil on paper mounted on canvas,  
62.5 x 48 cm. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



I still have to congratulate you on the occasion of Mother's birthday. I wrote to them yesterday, but the letter has not yet gone because I have not had the presence of mind to finish it. It is queer that already, two or three times before, I had had the idea of going to Pissarro's; this time, after your telling me of his recent misfortunes, I do not hesitate to ask you this. Yes, we must finish with this place, I cannot do the two things at once, work and take no end of pains to live with these queer patients here - it is upsetting.

In vain I tried to force myself to go downstairs. And yet it is nearly two months since I have been out in the open air.

In the long run I shall lose the faculty for work here, and that is where I begin to call a halt, and I shall send them then - if you agree - about their business. And then to go on paying for it, no, then one or other of the artists who is hard up will agree to keep house with me. It is fortunate that you can write saying you are well, and Jo too, and that her sister is with you.

I very much wish that, when your child comes, I might be back - not with you, certainly not, that is impossible, but in the neighbourhood of Paris with another painter. I could mention a third alternative, my going to the Jouvés, who have a lot of children and quite a household.

You understand that I have tried to compare the second attack with the first, and I only tell you this, it seemed to me to stem from some influence or other from outside, rather than from within myself. I may be mistaken, but however it may be, I think you will feel it quite right that I have rather a horror of all religious exaggeration.

The good M. Peyron will tell you heaps of things, probabilities and possibilities, and involuntary acts. Very good, but if he is more precise than that I shall believe none of it. And we shall see then what he will be precise about, if he is precise. The treatment of patients in this hospital is certainly easy, one could follow it even while travelling, for they do absolutely nothing; they leave them to vegetate in idleness and feed them with stale and slightly spoiled food. And I will tell you now that from the first day I refused to take this food, and until my attack I ate only bread and a little soup, and as long as I remain here I shall continue this way. It is true that after this attack M. Peyron gave me some wine and meat, which I accepted willingly the first days, but I wouldn't want to be an exception to the rule for long, and it is right to respect the regular rules of the establishment. I must also say that M. Peyron does not give me much hope for the future, and this I think right, he

makes me realise properly that everything is doubtful, that one can be sure of nothing beforehand. I myself expect it to return, but it is just that work takes up my mind so thoroughly, that I think that with the physique I have, things may continue for a long time in this way.

The idleness in which these poor unfortunates vegetate is a pest, but there, it is a general evil in the towns and countryside under this stronger sunshine, and having learnt a different way of life, certainly it is my duty to resist it. I finish this letter by thanking you again for yours and begging you to write to me again soon, and with many handshakes in thought.

[Pissarro's mother had recently died and he had also had an eye operation.]



262. *Irises*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 71 x 93 cm.  
J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 7 December 1889**

My dear Theo,

Yesterday I sent off by post three packages, containing studies which I hope will reach you safely. I have to thank you for 10 metres of canvas which have just arrived.

Among the studies you will find the following which are for Mother and our sister: "Olives", "Bedroom", "Reaper", "Ploughing", "Wheat Field with Cypresses", "Orchard in Blossom", "Portrait".

The rest are mostly studies of autumn, and I think that the best is the yellow mulberry tree against a bright blue sky - then the study of the house and the park, of which there are two variations. The studies, size 30 canvases, were not yet dry, and will follow later. They are giving me a lot of trouble, and sometimes I think they are very ugly, sometimes they seem good to me; perhaps you will have the same impression when you see them. There are a dozen of them, so it is more considerable than what I have just sent. I have gone on working outside till now in spite of the cold, and I think it is doing me good, and the work too. The last study I did is a view of the village, where they were at work - under some enormous plane trees - repairing the pavements. So there are heaps of sand, stones and gigantic trunks - the leaves yellowing and here and there you get a glimpse of a house front and small figures.

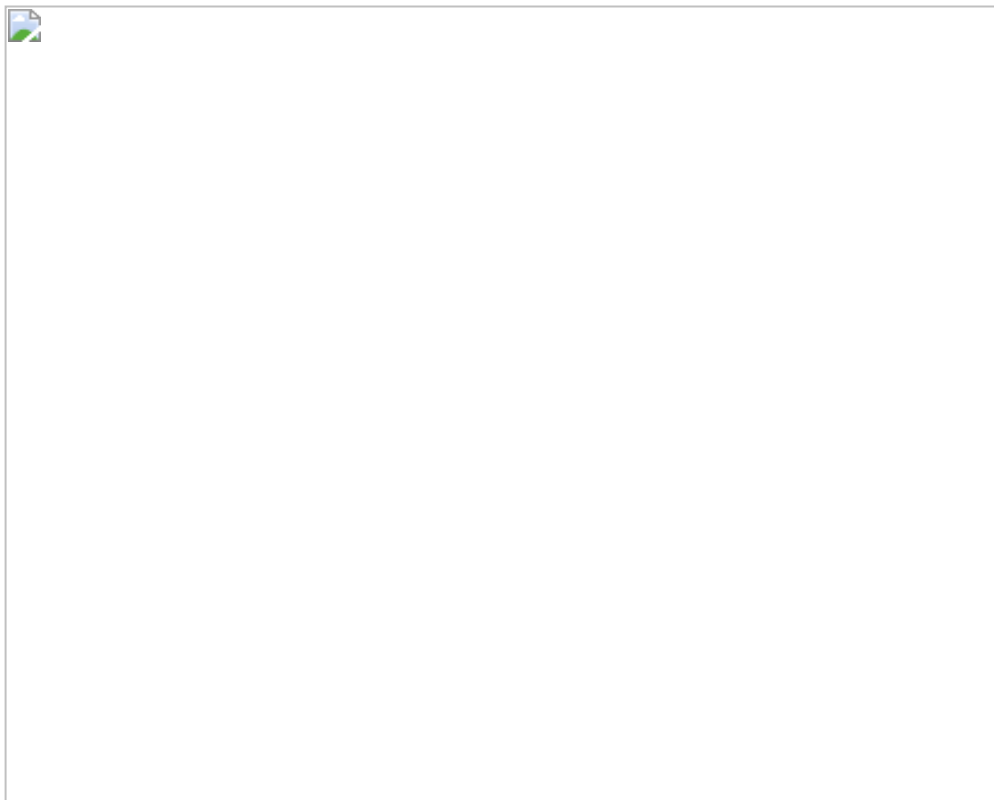
I think of you and Jo very often, but feeling as though there were an enormous distance between here and Paris and it was years since I saw you. I hope you are well. For myself I have nothing to complain of, I am feeling absolutely normal, so to speak, but without an idea for the future, and really I do not know what is going to happen, and perhaps I rather avoid facing this question, feeling that I can do nothing about it.

I have also finished the copy of the "Diggers" or nearly so.

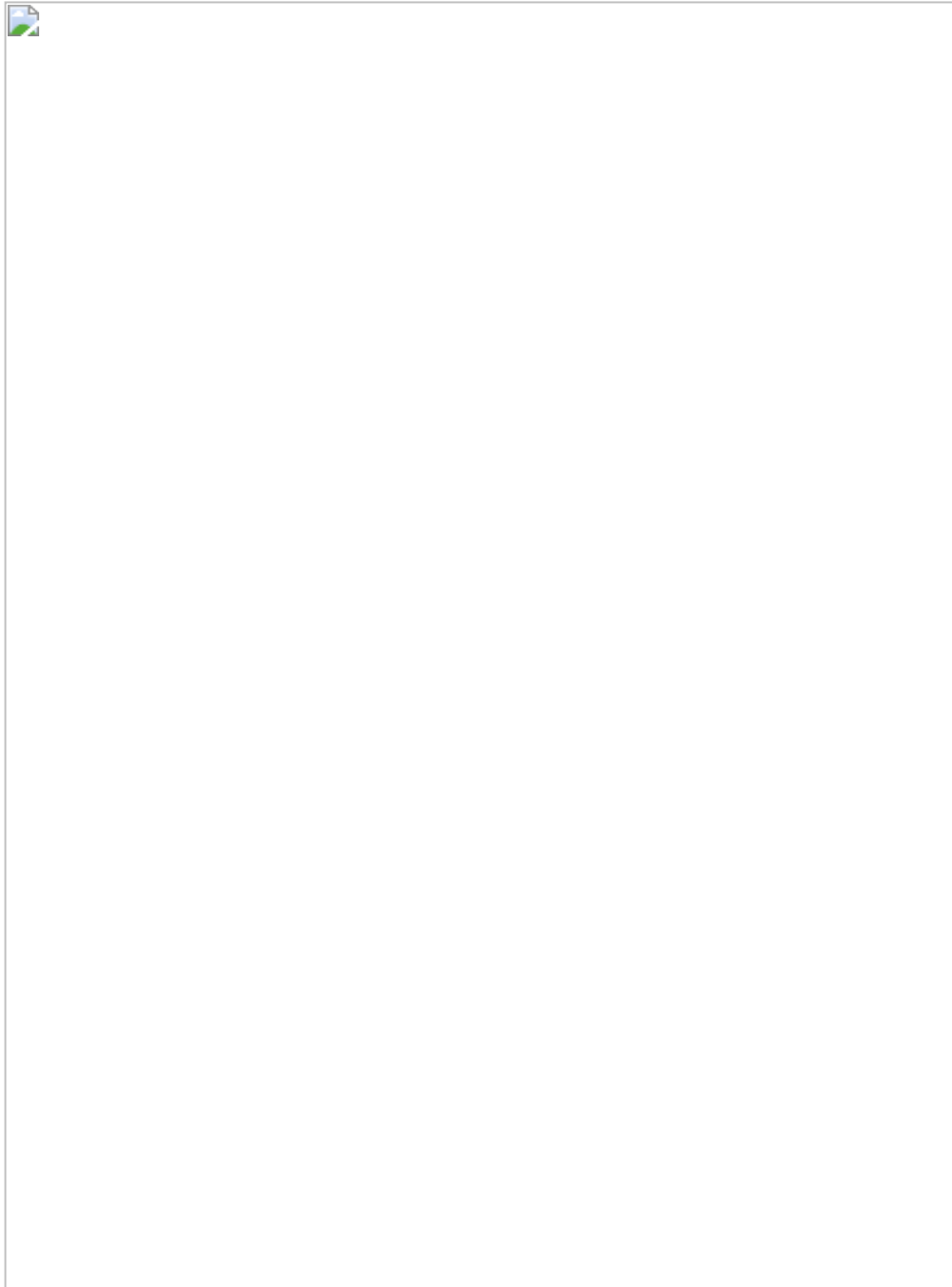
You will see that there are no more impastos in the big studies. I prepare the thing with a sort of wash of essence, and then proceed with strokes or hatchings in colour with spaces between them. That gives atmosphere and you use less paint. If I want to send this letter off today, I must hurry, so a handshake in thought and kindest regards to Jo.

Ever yours,

Vincent

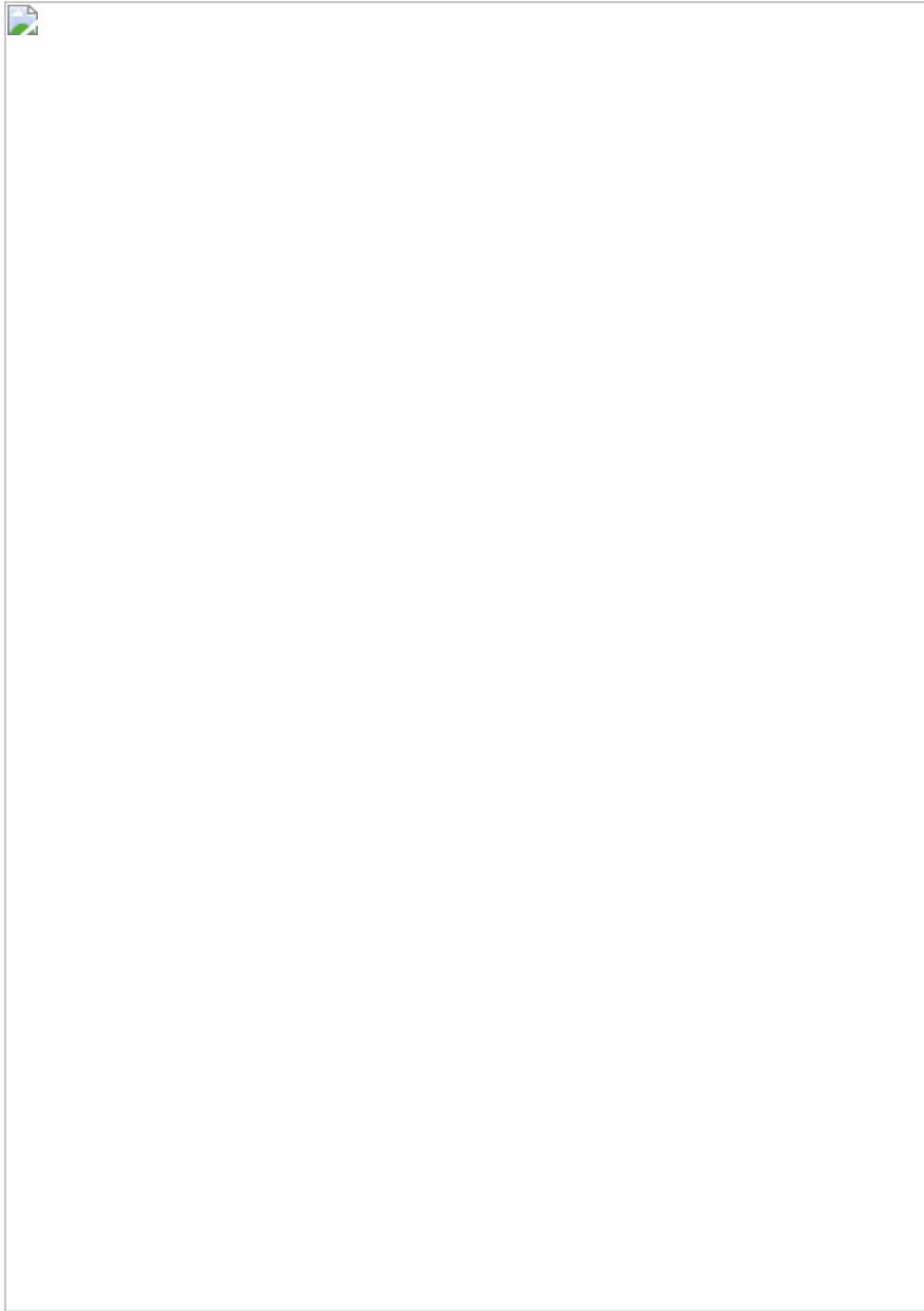


263. *Irises*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73.7 x 92.1 cm.  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

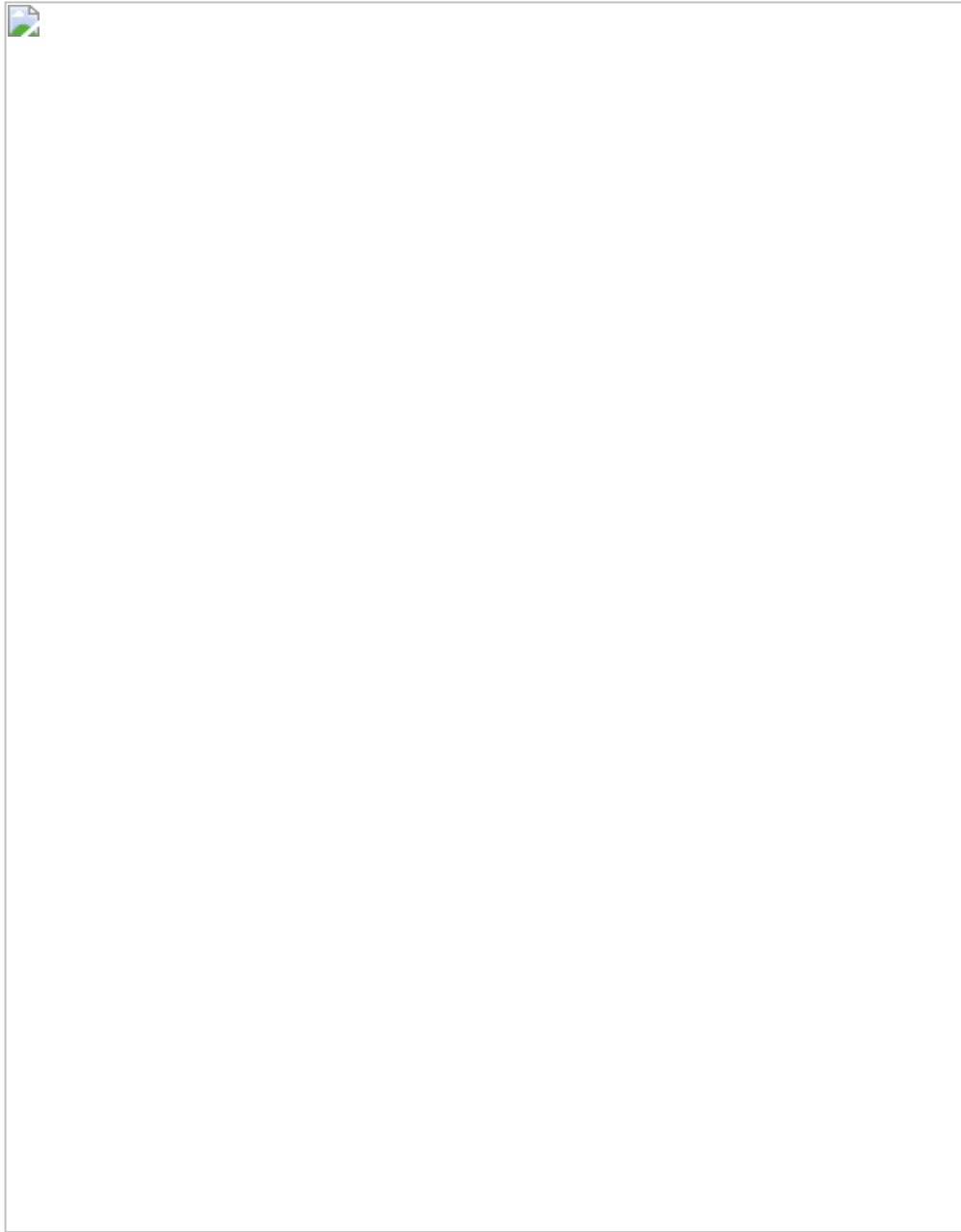


264. *Butterflies and Poppies*,  
Saint-Rémy, April-May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 34.5 x 25.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





265. *Emperor Moth*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 33.5 x 24.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



266. *The Diggers*,  
Saint-Rémy, autumn 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 65.1 x 50.2 cm.  
The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.

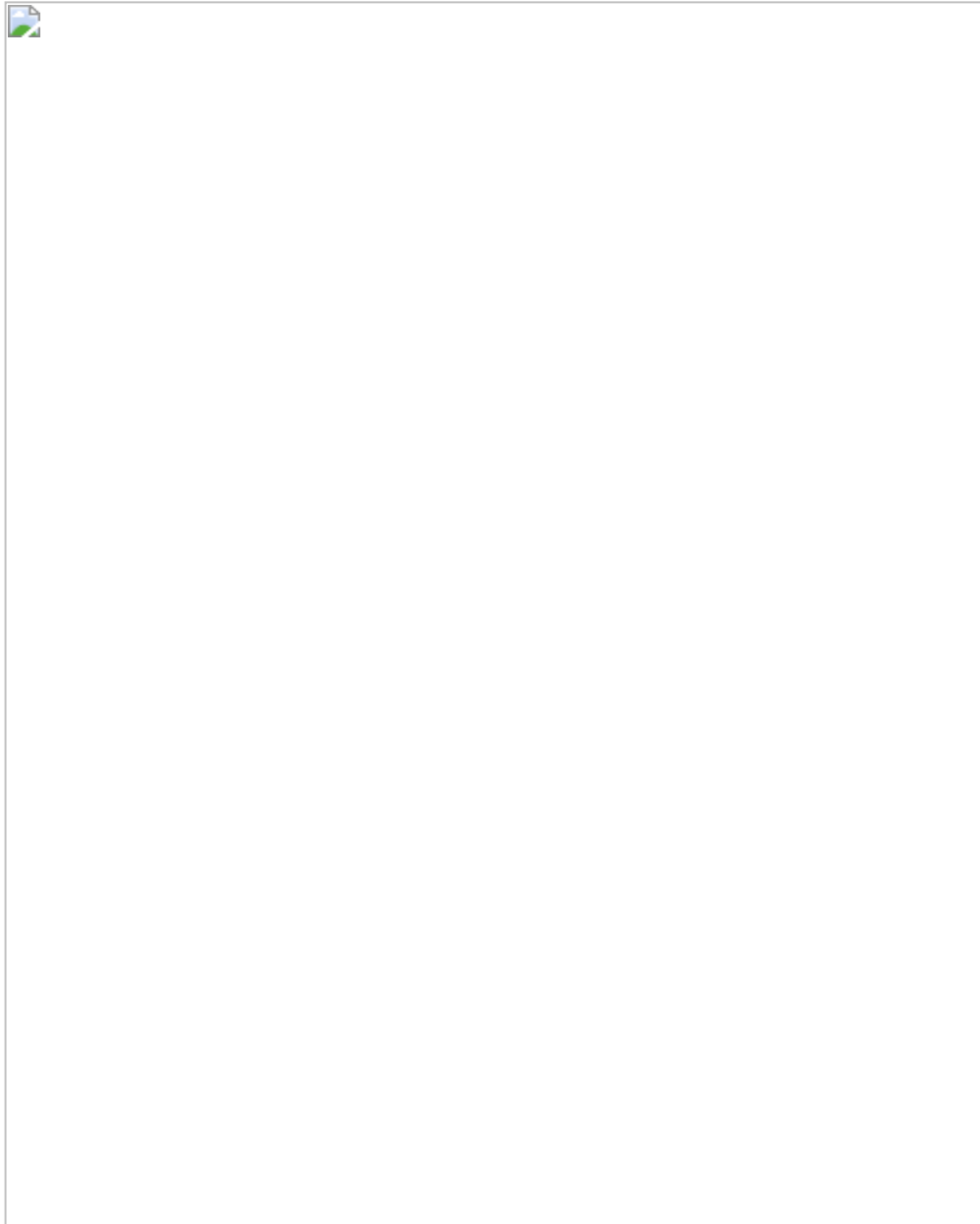
**Letter from Johanna van Gogh-Bonger to Vincent van Gogh  
Saint-Rémy, 29 January 1890**

Paris, 29 January 1890

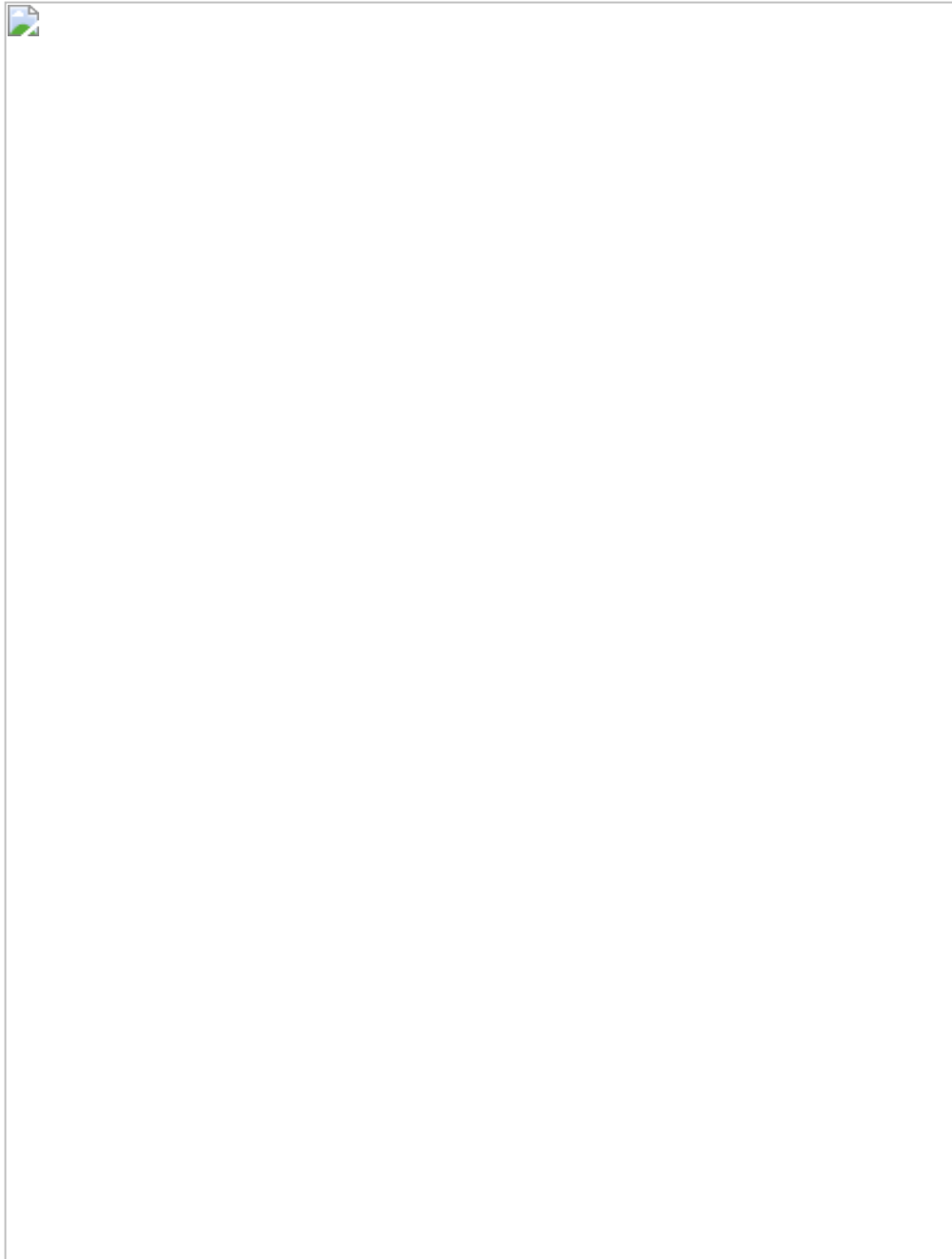
Dear Vincent,

Every since Christmas it has been my intention, day after day, to write to you - there is even a half- finished letter to you in my writing case - and even now, if I should not make haste to write you this letter, you would get the news sooner that your little namesake had arrived. Before this moment, however, I want to say good night to you. It is precisely midnight - the doctor has gone to sleep for a while, for tonight he prefers to stay in the house - Theo, Mother and Wil are sitting around the table with me - awaiting future events - it is such a strange feeling - over and over again that question, Will the baby be here by tomorrow morning? I cannot write much, but I so dearly wanted to have a chat with you - Theo brought along the article from the *Mercure* this morning, and after we had read it, Wil and I talked about you for a long time - I am eager for your next letter, which Theo is anxiously awaiting too - shall I read it? So far all has gone well - I must try to be of good heart. Tonight - and all through these days for that matter - I have been wondering so much whether I have really been able to do something to make Theo happy in his marriage - he certainly has me. He has been so good to me, so good - if things should not turn out well - if I should have to leave him - then you must tell him - for there is nobody on earth he loves so much - that he must never regret that he married me, for he has made me, oh, so happy. It is true that such a message sounds sentimental - but I cannot tell him now - for half of my company has fallen asleep, he too, for he is so very tired. Oh, if I could give him a healthy sweet little boy, wouldn't that make him happy! I think I shall stop now, for I have attacks of pain every now and then which prevent me from thinking or writing in an orderly way. When you receive this all will be over. Believe me,

Yours affectionately, Jo



267. *The Sower (after Millet)*,  
Saint-Rémy, late October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 80.8 x 66 cm.  
Collection of Stavros S. Niarchos, London.



268. *The Shepherdess (after Millet)*,  
Saint-Rémy, November 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 53 x 41.5 cm.  
Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 31 January 1890**

Paris, 31 January 1890

My dear Vincent,

Dr. Peyron wrote to tell me that you had had a paroxysm of your malady once again. My poor brother, I am infinitely sorry that things do not go with you as they ought to. Fortunately it did not last long the last time, and we hope ardently that you will recover quickly this time too. This is the only cloud in the sky of our happiness, for, my dear brother, the bad moment for Jo is past. She has brought into the world a beautiful boy, who cries a good deal, but who looks healthy. My poor little wife suffered a lot, because the waters came too soon, but fortunately we had an excellent doctor, who had extraordinary patience, for anyone else in his place would certainly have used forceps. Jo is very well, and has not had any fever, but it might come on yet. The child has started crying already.

How happy I should be if after some time, when Jo has recovered, you could come to see her and our little fellow. As we told you at the time, we are going to name him after you, and I devoutly hope that he will be able to be as persevering and as courageous as you. Please write to me as soon as you can to tell me how you are, and whether there have been occurrences which may have provoked the new crisis.

We speak of you frequently and we think of you still more frequently. I hope with all my heart that you will get better in the near future.

Be of good heart!

Sincerely yours, Theo



269. *Morning: Going Out to Work (after Millet)*,  
Saint-Rémy, January 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.  
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.



270. *Noon: Rest from Work (after Millet)*,  
Saint-Rémy, c. 1889-1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 91 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.





271. *Enclosed Wheat Field with Peasant*,  
Saint-Rémy, early October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 54 x 65.4 cm.  
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis.

## **Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh Saint-Rémy, 9 February 1890**

Paris, 9 February 1890

My dear Vincent,

Your last letter gave us a great deal of pleasure, and we are happy to see that you are in comparatively good health. All goes well with us; Jo is nursing the baby, and has no lack of milk, and at times the little one lies with his eyes wide open and his fists pressed against his face. Then he has an air of perfect well-being. He has blue eyes like the baby you painted, and big round cheeks. He gives his mother a lot of trouble, but it seems that this is inevitable and she bears it very well. She'll be able to get up in a few days.

Wil left this morning; she has been an extremely helpful housekeeper. She is a dear good girl. I took her along once to see Degas, who said she reminded him of various figures in the old Dutch paintings, and that she made him want to go and see the museums in our native country. He trotted out quite a number of his things in order to find out which of them she liked best. She understood those nude women very well.

One morning we also went to the Louvre, where they have hung a lot of pictures in new places. The Van der Meer of Delft is now on the five feet high ledge, the "Little Philosophers" by Rembrandt have been cleaned a little, which enables one to see these pictures as never before. The "Infanta Marguerita" is in the square hall. In short they have made a number of changes which were highly necessary.

The doctor who treated Jo said of Wil that she is much too good to marry. Nevertheless I should feel quite happy if she did.

Gauguin arrived in Paris yesterday, and asked a lot of questions about you. He came here to see whether he couldn't find something, no matter what, to do to earn a living for it seems that De Haan is very hard up too. His family cannot understand at all why he doesn't stay with them, and seeing that they are terrible Jews they probably think they will be able to force him to come back by cutting off his food supply. De Haan sent me a picture with the request that I send it on to his brother. One can see that he is making a strong effort; they are pink and orange onions, green apples and an earthenware pot; it is well thought out with regard to the colour values and the influence of the various tones on each other. I should prefer to see a little more

freedom of treatment in it, but it is carefully studied, and it is kept in a rather bright yellow tone. There are three exhibitions here, of the Mirlitons, the Cercle Volney, and the Aquarellists, but one might say there is nothing good; it is as though those top dogs were falling more and more into their dotage.

I hope that your health will continue to be good, and that the things which worry you will disappear. Kindest regards from Jo. Be of good heart, and once again thanks for your good letter. A handshake!

Theo



272. *Wheat Field with a Reaper*,  
Saint-Rémy, June 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 74 x 92 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 10 or 11 February 1890**

My dear Theo,

I was busy writing you to send you the reply for M. Aurier when your letter arrived. I'm very glad that Jo and the little one are well and that she expects to be able to get up a few days from now. Then what you tell me about our sister also interests me very much. I think she was lucky to see Degas at his home.

And so Gauguin has returned to Paris. I am going to copy my reply to M. Aurier to send to him, and you must make him read this article in the *Mercure*, for really I think they ought to say things like that of Gauguin, and of me only very secondarily. Gauguin wrote me that he had exhibited in Denmark and that this exhibition had been a great success. It seems a pity to me that he did not stay on here a little longer. Together we should have worked better than I have all by myself this year. And now we should have a little house of our own to live and work in, and could even put others up.

Did you notice in the paper you sent me an article about the productivity of certain artists, Corot, Rousseau, Dupré, etc? Do you remember how many times, when Reid was there, we talked about the same thing - the necessity of producing a lot?

And that, shortly after I came to Paris, I said to you that I should be unable to do anything until I had 200 canvases, which seems to indicate that for some natures, working too quickly is really all in the day's work, the normal condition of regular production, considering that a painter really ought to work quite as hard as a shoemaker, for instance.

Wouldn't it be a good idea to send Reid, and perhaps Tersteeg too, or rather C. M., a copy of Aurier's article? It seems to me that we ought to take advantage of it to dispose of something in Scotland, either now or later.

I think you will like the canvas for M. Aurier; it is in a terribly thick impasto and worked over like some Monticellis; I have kept it for almost a year. But I think I must try to give him something good for this article, which is very much a work of art in itself; and it will do us a real service against the day when we, like everybody else, shall be obliged to try to recover what the pictures cost. Anything beyond that leaves me pretty cold,

but recovering the money it costs to produce is the very condition of being able to go on.

As to the Impressionists' exhibition in March, I hope to send you a few more canvases, which are drying at the moment; if they do not arrive in time, you could make a selection from the ones that are at old Tanguy's.

I have tried to copy the "Men Drinking" by Daumier and the "Convict Prison" by Doré; it is very difficult.

One of these days I hope to start on the "Good Samaritan" by Delacroix and the "Woodcutter" by Millet.

Aurier's article would encourage me if I dared to let myself go, and venture even further, dropping reality and making a kind of music of tones with colour, like some Monticellis. But it is so dear to me, this truth, trying to make it true, after all I think, I think, that I would still rather be a shoemaker than a musician in colours.

In any case, trying to remain true is perhaps a remedy in fighting the disease which still continues to disquiet me.

Just now I am in pretty good health, however, and I should think that if I were to stay some time with you, it would do much to counteract the influence which the company I am in here necessarily exercises. But it seems to me that there is no hurry about this, and we must consider coolly if this is the moment to spend money on the journey; perhaps we could do something for Gauguin or Lauzet by giving up the journey. Recently I bought a suit, which cost me 35 francs. I must pay for it toward the end of March; with that I shall have enough for the whole year, for when I came here, I bought almost the same kind of suit for 35 francs, and it has lasted me all year. But I shall need a pair of shoes and some pants in March too.



273. *Olive Trees with the Alpilles in the Background*,  
Saint-Rémy, June-July 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 72.6 x 91.4 cm.  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



274. *Mulberry Tree*,  
Saint-Rémy, October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 54 x 65.1 cm.  
Norton Simon Museum of Art, Pasadena.



All things considered, life is not very expensive here; I think that in the North we should spend somewhat more.

And that's why - even if I came to you for some time - the best policy would still be to go on with the work here.

I don't know - either way seems good to me - but we mustn't be in a hurry to change.

And don't you think that in Antwerp - if we carried out Gauguin's plan - it would be necessary to maintain a certain position, to furnish a studio, in fact to do as the greater part of the established Dutch painters do? It isn't as simple as it looks, and I should fear, for him as well as for me, a regular siege by the established artists, and there would be the same business as there was in Denmark all over again.

Altogether we must begin by realizing that the established painters can do harm in the same old way to adventurers such as we should be in Antwerp, and might force us to clear out. And as for the dealers there, we mustn't count on them at all.

The academy there is better, and they work more vigorously there than in Paris.

And besides, at present Gauguin is constantly in Paris, his reputation holds there, and if he leaves for Antwerp, he might find that it is more or less difficult to return to Paris.

In going to Antwerp, I should fear more for Gauguin than for myself, for naturally I'd shift for myself with the Flemings, I should again take up the peasant studies started some time ago, and very regretfully abandoned. There is no need to tell you that I have a strong affection for the Campine. But I foresee that for him the struggle might be very hard, I think that you must tell him the pros and cons exactly as I should. I will write him soon, mainly to send him my reply to M. Aurier's article, and I should think that, if he liked, we could work together again here if his attempts to find a shelter do not succeed. But he is very clever, and perhaps he will manage in Paris itself, and if his reputation holds there, he will do well, for he always has this, that he was the very first to work in the tropics. And this question will necessarily come up again. Give him my kindest regards, and if he likes, he can take the repetitions of the "Sunflowers" and the repetition of "La Berceuse" in exchange for something of his that you would like.

If I came to Paris, I should have to touch up several canvases done at the beginning here, it isn't lack of work I should be suffering from there.

Kind regards to Jo, and a good handshake in thought.

Ever yours, Vincent

Please send the enclosed letter, after you have read it, to M. Aurier.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 23 April 1890**

Paris, 23 April 1890

My dear Vincent,

Your silence proves to us that you are still suffering, and I feel urgently impelled to tell you, my dear brother, that Jo and I suffer too because we know you are ill. Oh how happy we should be if we could do something for you that might give you solace. Dr. Peyron writes us that we are not to be uneasy, and that this crisis, though it is lasting longer than the others, will pass off too. If the distance were not so great, I should certainly have gone to see you, and I count on it that, as soon as you feel the need of it, you will say the word, and I shall come at once.

Last week it was already a year since I got married. How time flies. We have every reason to be satisfied with this year. I do not forget that you insisted on my getting married, and you were right, for I am much happier. It is true that my dear wife is not like everybody, and that I was marvelously lucky when I found her. We understand each other very well, and our home is pleasant. The little one particularly gives Jo a lot of work, but he is growing surprisingly. He is of a nervous disposition but very gentle. He will stay awake for hours without crying; he is beginning to smile and to make sounds that must be the beginning of speaking. It would do you good to see him and play with him.

It is our intention to pass the two holidays at Whitsuntide with Pissarro, who has invited us. He is going to London this summer to work there.

Your pictures at the exhibition are having a lot of success. The other day Diaz stopped me in the street and said, "Give your brother my compliments and tell him that his pictures are highly remarkable." Monet said that your pictures were the best of all in the exhibition. A lot of other artists have spoken to me about them. Serret came to our house to see the other pictures, and he was enraptured. He said that if he had no style of his own in which he could still express some things, he would change his course and go seek what you are seeking. Lauzet is back; he was not able to call on you, for his mother and sister, who lived in Marseilles, have come to stay with him, and he had to help them move, and he didn't have a penny to spend on a detour.

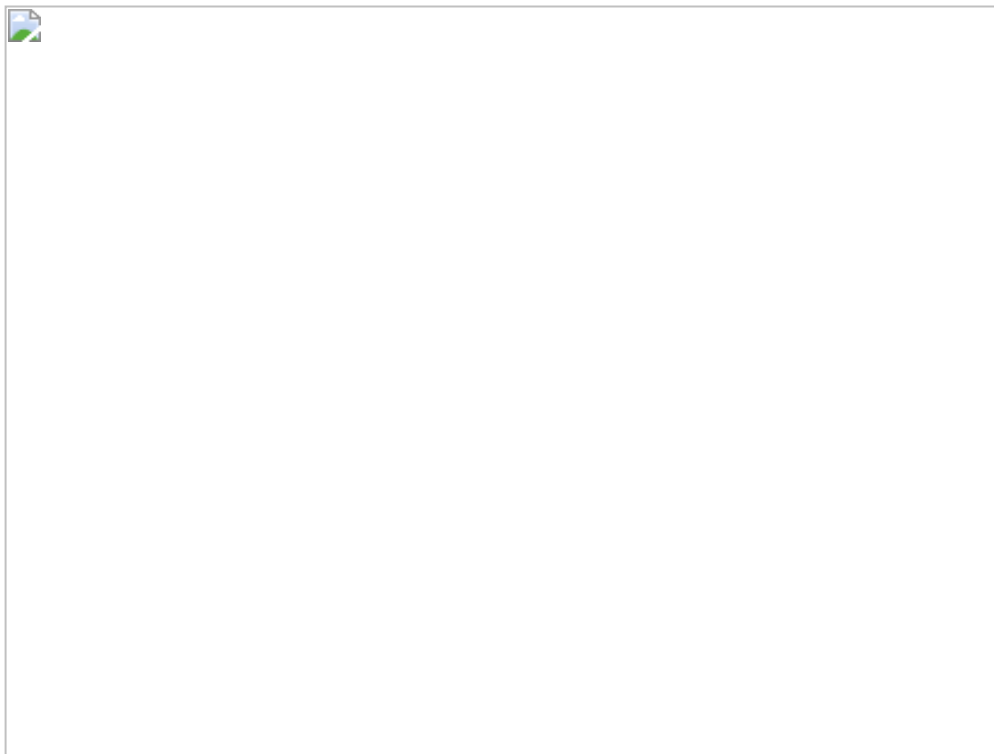
My dear brother, remember that nothing in the world would give me greater pleasure than knowing you happy and in good health, and that every day I pray for your speedy recovery.

Be courageous, and a cordial handshake from Jo and from your brother who loves you.

Theo



275. *Pine Trees at Sunset*,  
Saint-Rémy, December 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.



276. *Wooden Sheds*,  
Saint-Rémy, December 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 45.5 x 60 cm.  
Private Collection, Brussels.



277. *A Wheat Field with Cypresses*,  
Saint-Rémy, September 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 72.1 x 90.9 cm.  
The National Gallery, London.



278. *View of the Church at Saint-Paul-de-Mausole*,  
Saint-Rémy, October 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 44.5 x 60 cm.  
Collection of Elizabeth Taylor, United States.



**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 30 April 1890**

My dear Theo,

Until now I have not been able to write you, but being a bit better just now, I did not wish to delay wishing you a happy year, since it's your birthday, you and your wife and child. At the same time I beg you to accept the various pictures I am sending you with my thanks for all the kindness you have shown me, for without you I should be very unhappy.

You will see that first of all there are canvases after Millet.

Not being intended for the public, perhaps you will eventually make presents of these to our sisters. But first you must keep what you like and as much as you want, it's yours absolutely. One of these days you will send me something else to do by past or present artists, if you can find anything.

The rest of the canvases aren't much; not having been able to work for two months, I am very much behind. You will find that the olives with the pink sky are the best, and the mountains, I imagine; the first would go well as a pendant to those with the yellow sky. As for the portrait of the Arlésienne, you know that I have promised a copy of it to our friend Gauguin, and you must send it to him. Then the cypresses are for M. Aurier. I should have liked to do them again with a little less impasto, but I haven't time.

They must get several washes with cold water, then a strong varnish when the impastos are thoroughly dry, then the blacks will not become dirty-looking when the oil has evaporated. In the meantime I shall of course want paints, which you might get again in part from Tanguy, if he is hard up, or if he should like it. But of course he mustn't be more expensive than the other one. Here is the list of the colours I want:

12    zinc white    3 cobalt 5 malachite green

Large 1    crimson lake                      2       chrome 2

tubes 2    emerald green                      4       chrome I

1 orange lead

2 ultramarine

Then (but at Tasset's) 2 geranium lake, medium-sized tubes. You would do me a kindness if you sent me at least half of them at once, at once, because I have wasted too much time.

Then I shall need 6 brushes - 6 marten brushes - and 7 meters of canvas or even 10.

What am I to say about these last two months? Things didn't go well at all. I am sadder and more wretched than I can say, and I do not know at all where I have got to.

The order for paints is rather big, so let me wait for half of it if it is more convenient to you.

While I was ill I nevertheless did some little canvases from memory which you will see later, memories of the North, and now I have just finished a corner of a sunny meadow, which I think is fairly vigorous. You will see it soon.

M. Peyron being away, I have not yet read my letters, but I know that some have come. He has been good enough to keep you posted on the situation, I do not know myself what to do or what to think, but I greatly wish to leave this house. That will not surprise you, I need say no more to you.

Letters from home have come too, which I have not yet had the courage to read, I feel so melancholy. Please ask M. Aurier not to write any more articles on my painting, insist upon this, that to begin with he is mistaken about me, since I am too overwhelmed with grief to be able to face publicity. Making pictures distracts me, but if I hear them spoken of, it pains me more than he knows. How is Bernard? As there are some canvases in duplicate, if you like you can exchange with him, for a good canvas by him would be a fine thing to have in your collection.

I felt ill at the time I was doing the almond blossoms. If I had been able to go on working, you can judge from it that I would have done others of trees in blossom. Now the trees in blossom are almost over, really I have no luck. Yes, I must try to get out of here, but where to go? I do not think I could be more shut up and more of a prisoner in the homes where they do not pretend to leave you free, such as at Charenton or Montevergues.

If you write home, give them my kindest regards and tell them I often think of them. There, a good handshake for you and Jo, and believe me,

Ever yours, Vincent

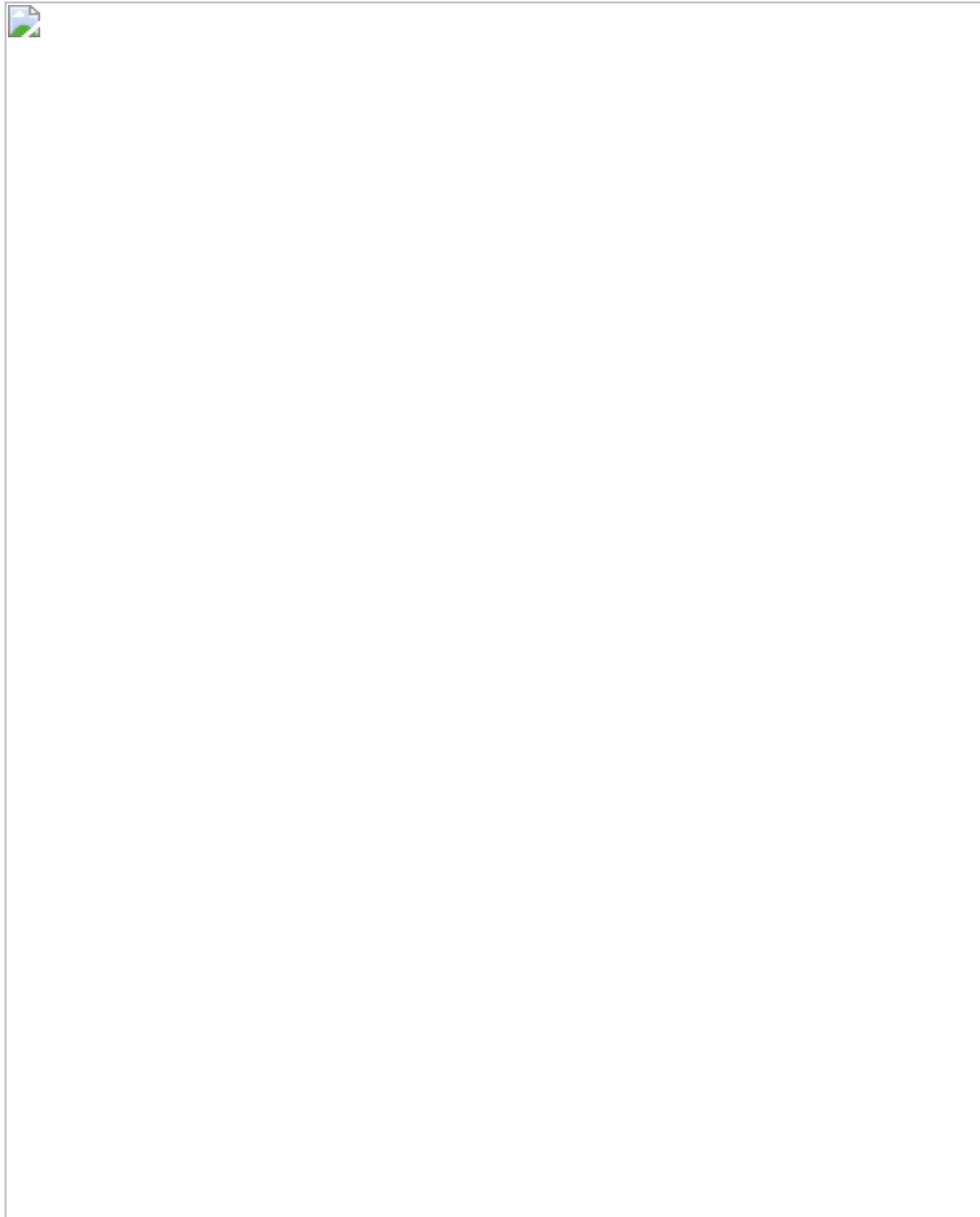
Please send me what you can find of figure among my old drawings. I am thinking of doing the picture of the "Peasants at Dinner" [The Potato Eaters], with the lamplight effect again. That canvas must be quite black now, perhaps I could do it again altogether from memory.

You must send me the "Women Gleaning" and the "Diggers" if they are still there.

Then, if you like, I will do the old tower of Nuenen again and the cottage. I think that if you still have them, I can make something better of them now from memory.



279. *The Bedroom*,  
Saint-Rémy, early September 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 73.6 x 92.3 cm.  
The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago.



280. *The Good Samaritan (after Delacroix)*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 3 May 1890**

Paris, 3 May 1890

My dear Vincent,

I cannot tell you how glad I was of your letter, or rather your two letters; on the eve of my birthday I said to Jo, "If a letter should arrive from Vincent! - I should be hard put to it to mention anything I need to be completely happy." And look, there was your letter. Please understand that I should like you to feel better, and your fits of sadness to disappear. Your consignment of pictures arrived too, and there are very beautiful ones among them.

The guard and the other fellow with his swollen face are extraordinary; the branch of almond blossoms shows that for these themes you have missed the time of blooming of the trees and flowers. Let's hope that this will not be the case next time. The copies after Millet are perhaps the best things you have done yet, and induce me to believe that on the day you turn to painting compositions of figures, we may look forward to great surprises. The consignment of paints from Tasset and Tanguy has been sent off. I hadn't received your second letter, and I said to myself that you might have use for half the quantity extra. The picture for Aurier is one of the finest you have done so far; it has the richness of a peacock's tail. I am going to take it to him very soon; I had the frame made according to your description, for that much I certainly owe him, and he is not rich.

And now what is most important is your second letter in your telling me of your intention to come here. I am very happy that you feel strong enough to attempt a change, and I approve absolutely of your coming as soon as possible, to make a decision, for, after taking Dr. Peyron's advice, only you can bear the responsibility. Your trip to Arles was definitely disastrous; is it certain that travelling will do you no harm this time? If I were in your place I should only act in conformity with Dr. Peyron's views, and in any case as soon as you have decided to come here, it will be absolutely necessary for you to get somebody you trust to accompany you during the whole journey. The exertion of travelling and the sensations awakened by the sight of well-known spots may have an effect on your malady. If it should be possible I

should so much like to have you with us for some time at least, and if you do everything to take care of yourself, it is very probable that all will go well.

You say that people down there understand nothing of painting, but it is absolutely the same here, and don't think that you will find things different anywhere else, exceptions aside.

We have conversed with one category of people who have made painting their principal occupation, but if you don't count these, it is Hebrew to the general public, and the simple things are even less understood than those whose subject gives them something to puzzle over, etc.

I hope you will soon be able to tell me that your health is improving more and more, and that you will be able to carry out your plans. Please don't have too many illusions about life in the North; after all, every country has its advantages and disadvantages. I shall write you another letter before long, and I shall look for lithographs of the masters. I shall send them at the same time as the drawings from Brabant. Have courage, and a cordial handshake!

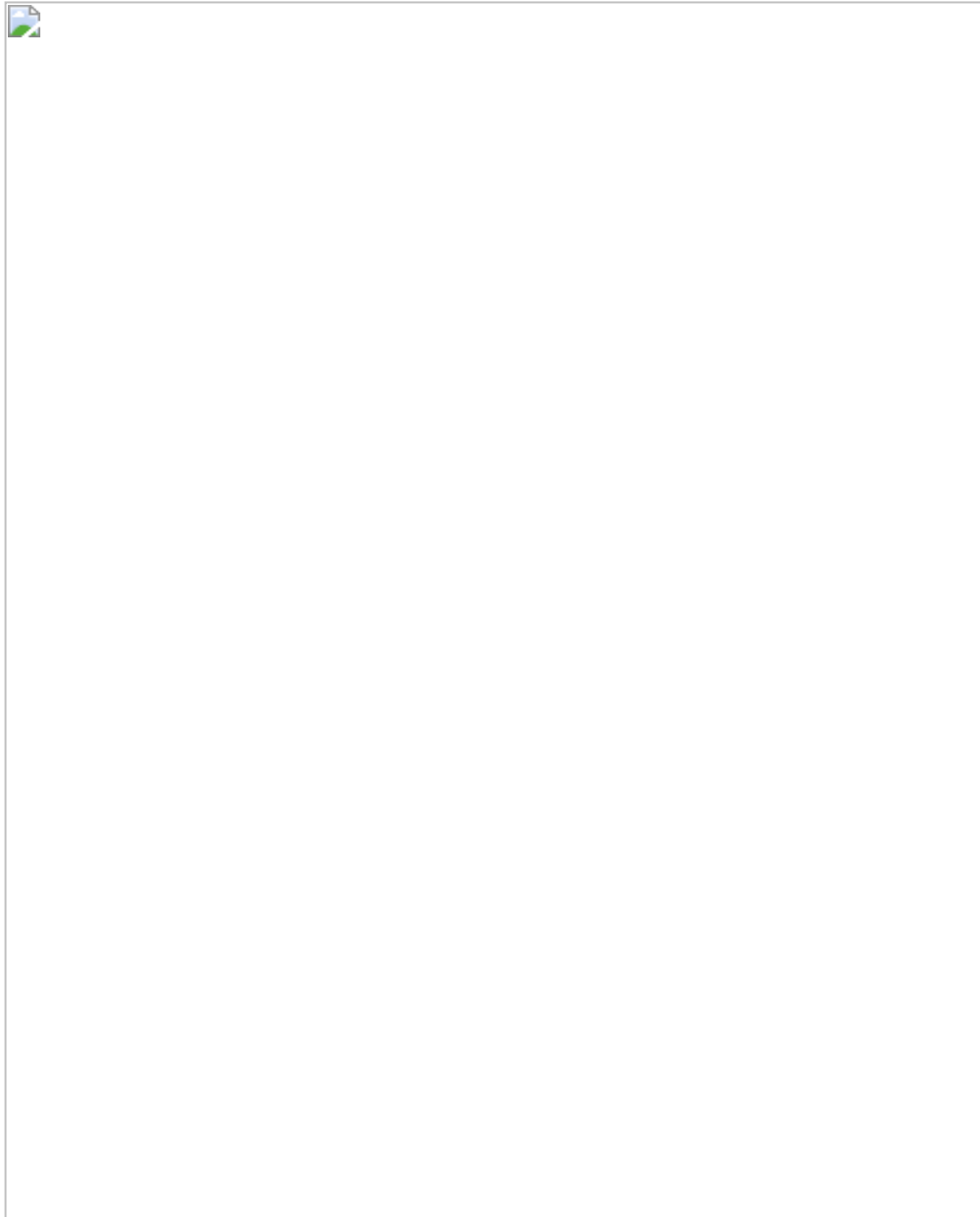
Once again thanks for your letters and pictures. If you should want anything, please say so. Business is good, and I have everything I want. Kindest regards from Jo and the little one. Their portrait enclosed.

Yours, Theo



281. *The Raising of Lazarus (after Rembrandt)*,  
Saint-Rémy, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50 x 65 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





282. *Pietà (after Delacroix)*,  
Saint-Rémy, September 1889.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 60.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Saint-Rémy, 10 May 1890**

Paris, 10 May 1890

My dear Vincent,

Many thanks for your two letters; I am happy to see that you continue to feel better, and it would give me a great deal of pleasure if you could undertake the journey without danger. Does it seem to you too that it is such a long time since we have seen each other? If you think it so annoying to travel in the company of one of the people of the establishment, my God, you must take the risk, although I must say that I am not like you, and that if I were you I should do it to avoid all the misery that would be brought about by the recurrence of a crisis, for instance if at some unknown railway station you should fall into the hands of people you don't know, and of whom you cannot tell how they would treat you. Now as soon as you start be sure to send me a telegram at once to let me know what time you will arrive at the Gare de Lyon, so that I may be able to go meet you. Of course it is understood that you will stay with us, if you will content yourself with the little room where we have lodged Wil and many others.

I wrote to Dr. Gachet yesterday to ask him when he is coming to Paris, for then he will sit for consultations, and I asked him at the same time to look for a boardinghouse for you. A change of country might certainly do you good, but with a view to wintertime it might be better if you were in a warmer climate. But we shall have time enough to talk about it. I also wrote to Dr. Peyron to tell him that, unless there should be some definite danger, I should like him to let you do as you wish, and to let you go. As he has been good to you, try not to hurt him.

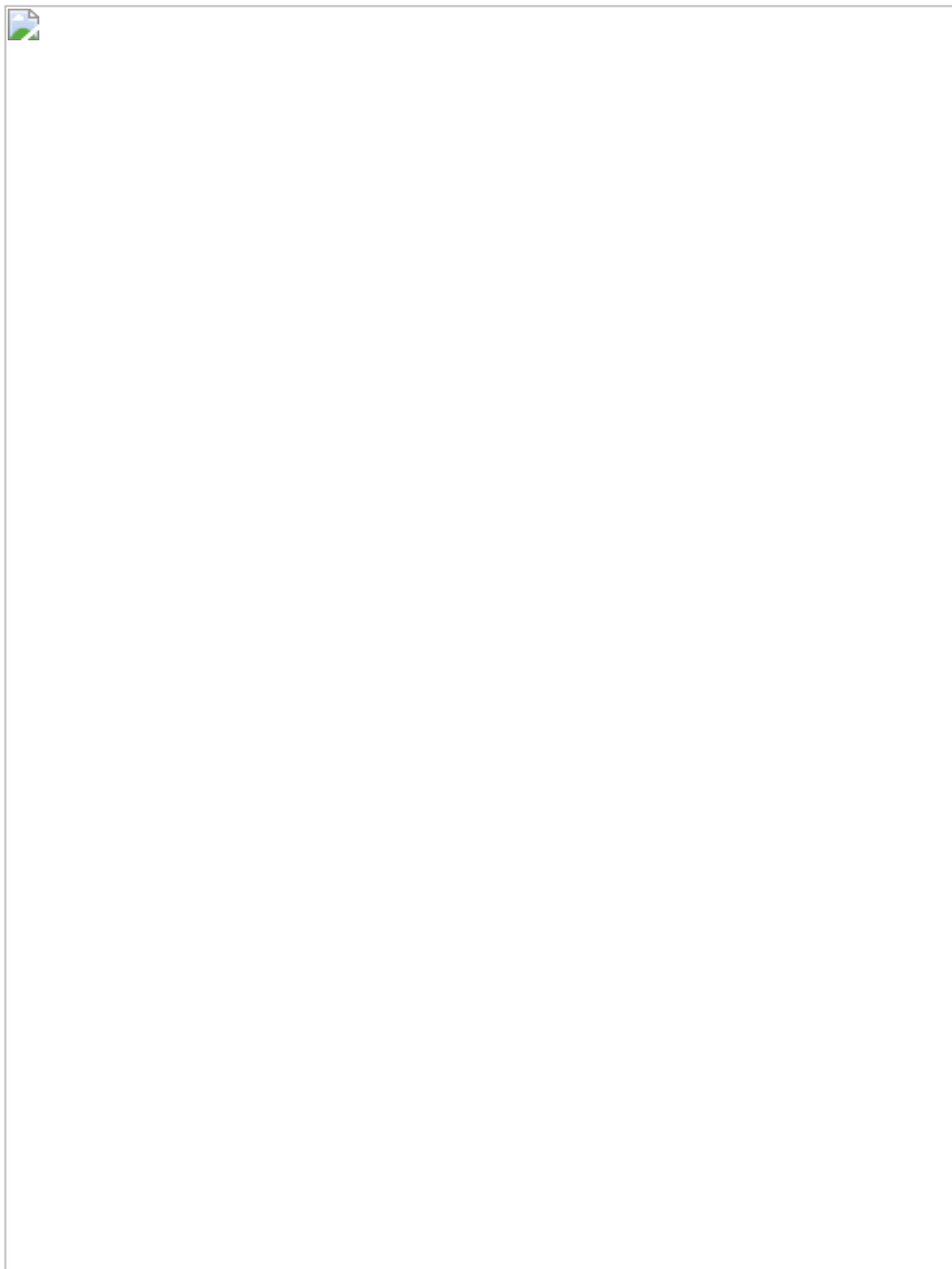
I have ordered the paints you asked for from Tanguy and Tasset, as I told myself that they would never be lost. If the paints have not arrived yet, please leave orders for them to be returned. Would it be possible for you to find a quiet spot where you will not be surrounded by people or things that annoy you? I hope so from the bottom of my heart, and at any rate it would mean an improvement, but people are much the same everywhere, and when you are engrossed in artistic things, you will find precious few people who understand you. To them it is Latin, and they see only a pastime in it, which one should not take seriously.

I have not yet been to the Salon, which they say is pretty mediocre, but there is an exhibition of Japanese drawings and crêpe prints - you will see it when you are here - which is superb. I wish you were here already.

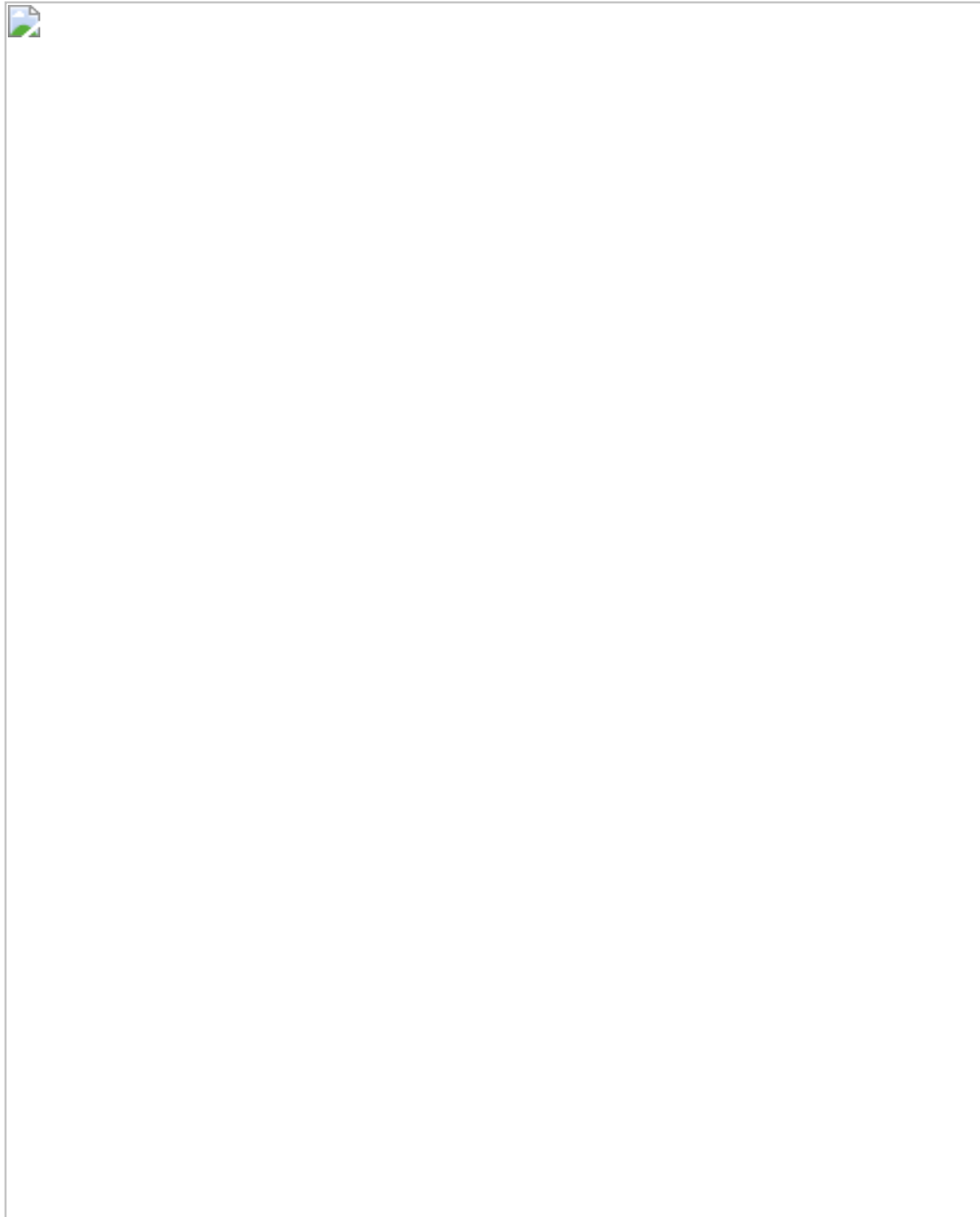
Don't forget to wire. Cordial greetings from Jo and the little one; they are both well; a cordial handshake, and I hope to see you soon.

Theo

I am sending you herewith 150 francs for the journey; and if there should not be enough money, please send me a telegram.



283. *The Exercise Yard (after Gustave Doré)*,  
Saint-Rémy, February 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 80 x 64 cm.  
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.



284. *The Church at Auvers-sur-Oise*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, c. 4-8 June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 94 x 74.5 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

## Auvers-sur-Oise: 1890

### ***“But there’s nothing sad in this death...”***

Van Gogh stayed only three days with Theo and his family in Paris before leaving for Auvers-sur-Oise. The reason for his short stay may have been the quarrels between Theo and Johanna, which van Gogh later described in his letters. When he arrived in Auvers on May 21st, Vincent wrote to his brother:

“Auvers is very beautiful, among other things a lot of old thatched roofs, which are getting rare. So, I should hope, that by settling down to do some canvases of this there would be chance of recovering the expenses of my stay – for really it is profoundly beautiful. It is the real country, characteristic and picturesque.”[\[124\]](#)

Nature and work were, again, the twin supports in van Gogh’s life. But there were no people around him. Dr. Gachet proved to be of little help. Van Gogh said: “I think we must not count on Dr. Gachet at all. First of all, he is sicker than I am, I think, or shall we say just as much, so that’s that. Now when one blind man leads another blind man, don’t they both fall into the ditch?”[\[125\]](#) The 62-year-old specialist in heart conditions and nervous diseases was a great art lover. He was in contact with many painters, and his collections, which were later given to the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, included paintings by Cézanne, Pissarro and van Gogh. The doctor was more interested in van Gogh as a painter than as a patient.

Van Gogh lived in the Ravoux Inn. Adeline, the daughter of the owner, at this time thirteen years old, later remembered her parents’ guest: “Van Gogh spent his days in a more or less uniform way: He ate breakfast, then around nine o’clock he left for the countryside with his easel and his paint box, with his pipe in his mouth (which he never put down); he went to paint. He returned punctually at noon for lunch. In the afternoon he often worked on a painting-in-progress... After dinner he played with my little sister, drew his Sandman for her, and then went immediately up to his room.”[\[126\]](#)

Adeline sat for van Gogh. So did the twenty-one-year-old Marguerite Gachet. A close friend of the doctor’s daughter later claimed that the painter and his model had fallen in love, and Dr. Gachet forbade van Gogh to come to his house any longer. Marguerite’s brother confirmed the story in an interview, but changed it on one critical point: He said that his sister didn’t return the affection of the 37-year-old painter. Obviously, the friendship between van Gogh and Gachet broke up soon; after July 2nd, van Gogh stopped mentioning him in his letters.

Adeline Ravoux reported that when Dr. Gachet was called in to examine him after van Gogh wounded himself with a revolver, both men behaved as if they had never met. During the two and a half months that he spent in Auvers, van Gogh went through a cycle that he had already experienced several times. He tried to build up a regular life with work, but he lost sight of his security, of his nest. Increasingly, he felt that he was a burden for Theo. During a visit to Paris, he was witness to a discussion between his brother and Johanna.

Theo wanted to leave Goupil to found his own gallery; his wife preferred that he stay in the same position even though he did not earn enough money. Vincent was not the only relative Theo had to support; he regularly sent money to his mother and his sister Willemien. Ten years earlier, when van Gogh started to depend on his brother's money, he wrote:

“If I had to believe that I were troublesome to you or to other people at home, or were in your way, of no good for anyone, and if I should be obliged to feel like an intruder or an outcast, so that I were better off dead... If it were indeed so, then I might wish that I had not much longer to live.”[127]

After his return from Paris van Gogh described the canvases he was working on to Theo and Johanna:

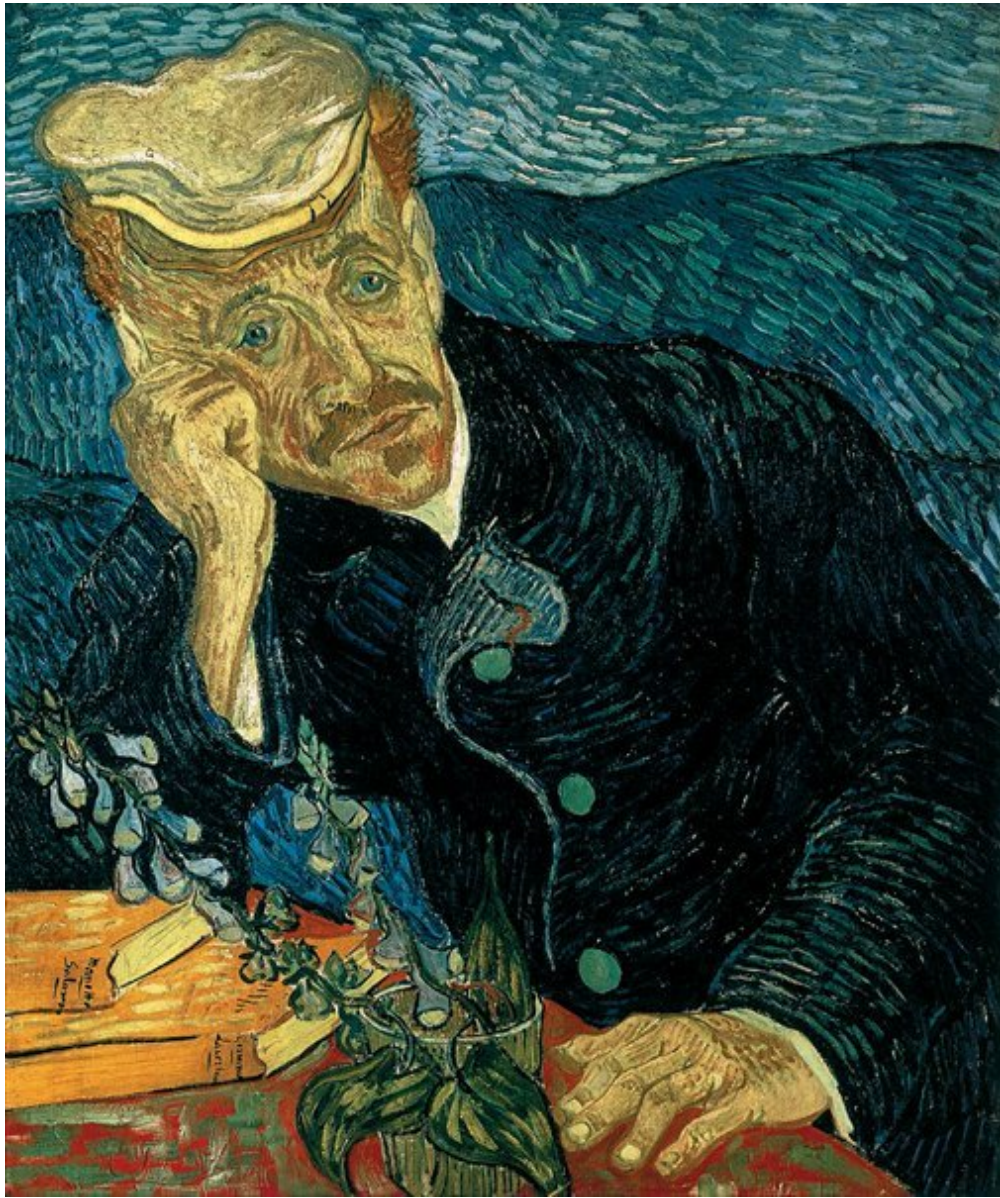
“They are vast fields of wheat under troubled skies, and I did not need to go out of my way to try to express sadness and extreme loneliness. I hope you will see them soon... since I almost think that these canvases will tell you what I cannot say in words, the health and restorative forces that I see in the country.”[128]

This paradox – the sadness and health of the country – reflects van Gogh's own situation: nature always was a kind of home for him – a home that he could never share with anyone else. In Saint-Rémy, van Gogh had worked on a picture named *The Reaper*:

“For I see in this reaper – a vague figure fighting like a devil in the midst of the heat to get to the end of his task – I see in him the image of death, in the sense that humanity might be the wheat he is reaping. So it is – if you like – the opposite of that sower I tried to do before. But there's nothing sad in this death, it goes its way in broad daylight with the sun flooding everything with a light of pure gold.”[129] It is said that van Gogh shot himself in a field, but there is little proof. If he had chosen the ‘pure gold’ of the wheat for his suicide, he decided, at least, not to die there lonely. After he had shot himself in his side, he returned to the inn and went to bed. The landlord informed Dr. Gachet and Theo. The brother described the last moments of van Gogh's life, which ended on July 29th, 1890: “I wanted to die. While I was sitting next to him promising that we would try to heal him..., he answered: ‘*La tristesse durera toujours.*’ [The sadness will last forever.]”[130]

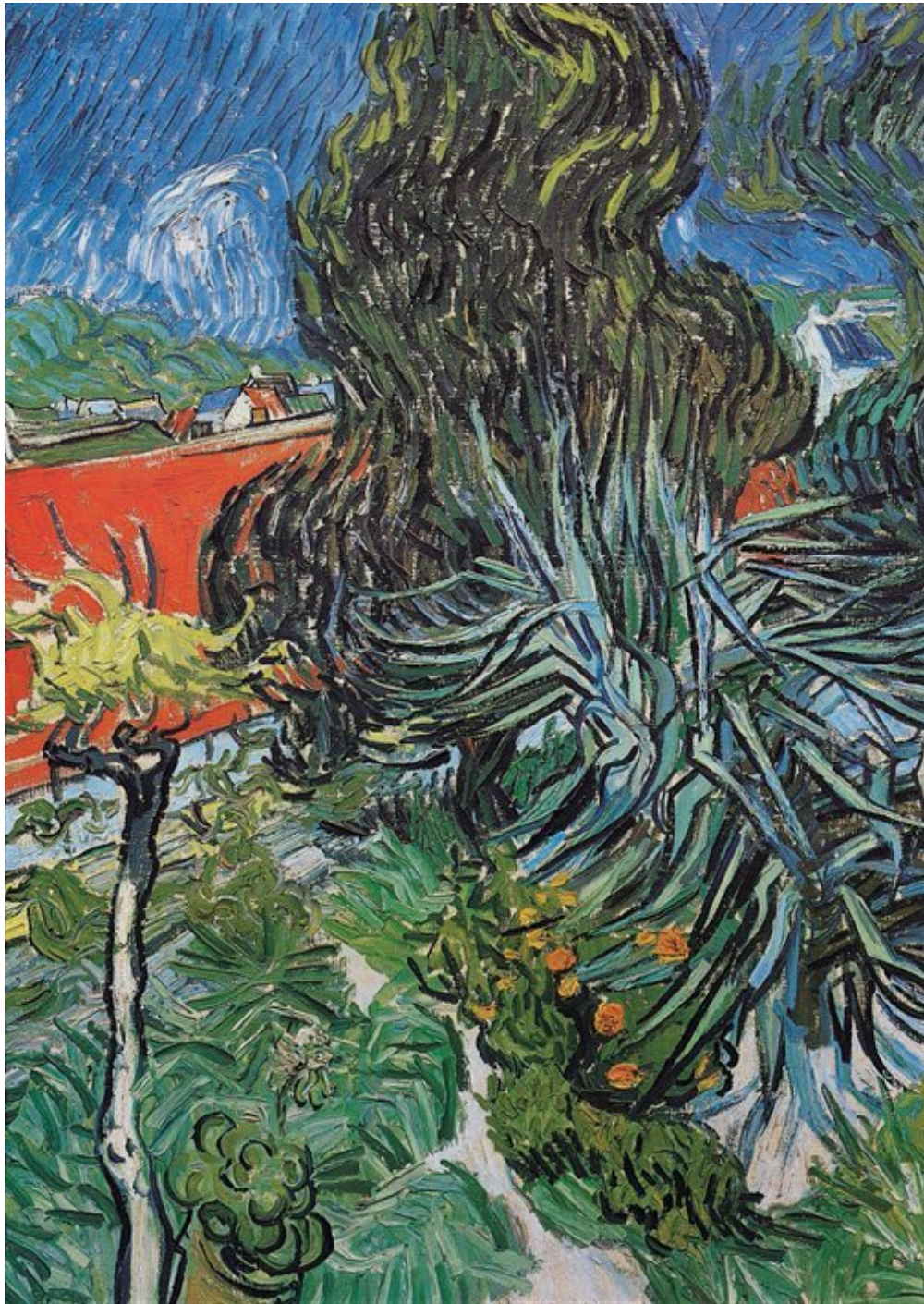
A few weeks before his suicide van Gogh had written to Theo:

“Even if I have not succeeded, all the same I think that what I have worked at will be carried on. Not directly, but one isn't alone in believing in things that are true. And what does it matter personally then? I feel so strongly that it is the same with people as it is with wheat, if you are not sown in the earth to germinate there, what does it matter? In the end you are ground between the millstones to become bread. The difference between happiness and unhappiness! Both are necessary and useful, as well as death or disappearance... it is so relative – and life is the same.”[131]



285. *Portrait of Doctor Gachet*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 66 x 57 cm. Private Collection.



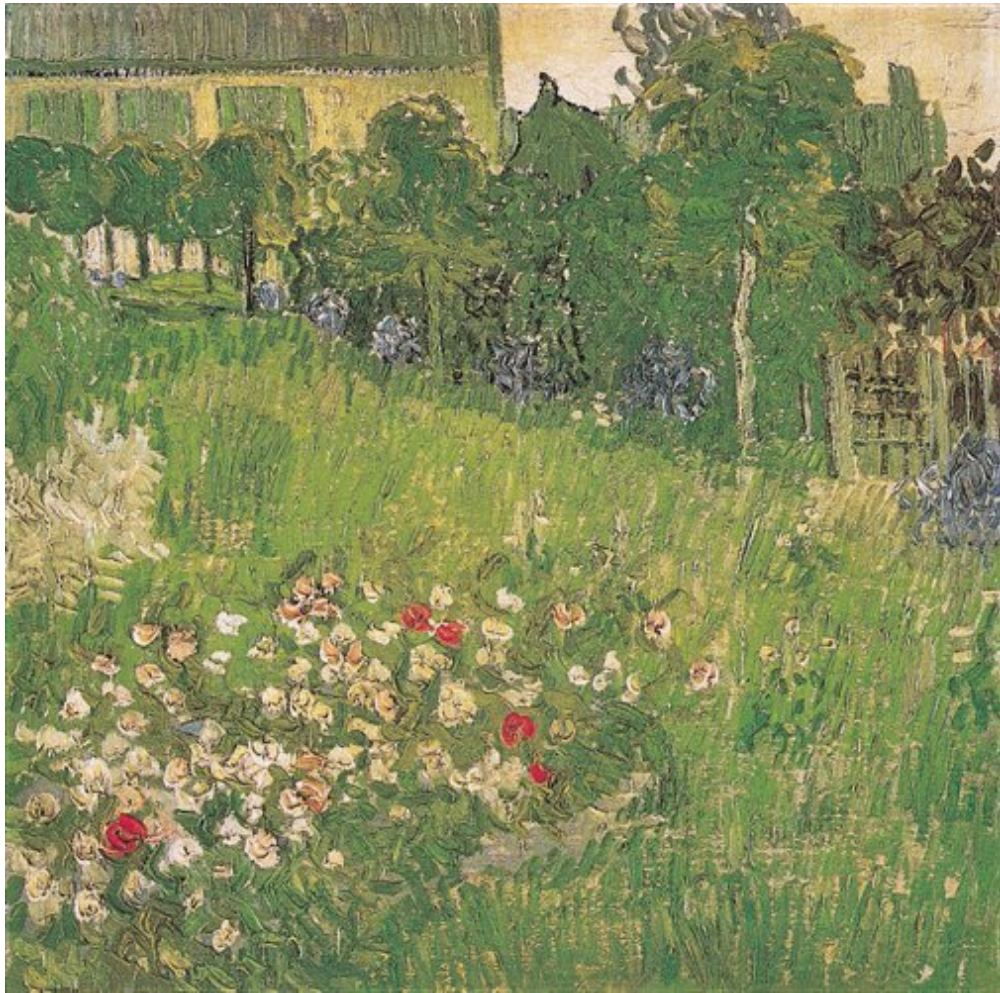


286. *Dr. Paul Gachet's Garden at Auvers-sur-Oise*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 52 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.





287. *Mlle Gachet in the Garden at Auvers-sur-Oise*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 46 x 55 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



288. *Daubigny's Garden*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, May-June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50.7 x 50.7 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 20 May 1890**

My dear Theo and dear Jo,

After having made Jo's acquaintance, henceforth it will be difficult for me to write only to Theo, but Jo will allow me, I hope, to write in French, because after two years in the Midi, I really think that I shall say what I have to say more clearly this way.

Auvers is quite beautiful, among other things a lot of old thatched roofs, which are getting rare. So I should hope that by settling down to do some canvases of this there would be a chance of recovering the expenses of my stay - for really it is profoundly beautiful, it is the real country, characteristic and picturesque.

I have seen Dr. Gachet, who made the impression on me of being rather eccentric, but his experience as a doctor must keep him balanced while fighting the nervous trouble from which he certainly seems to me to be suffering at least as seriously as I.

He piloted me to an inn where they asked 6 francs a day. All by myself I found one where I will pay 3.50 fr. a day.

And until further notice I think I will stay there. When I have done some studies, I shall see if it would be better to move, but it seems unfair to me, when you are willing and able to pay and work like any other labourer, to have to pay almost double because you work at painting. Anyway, I am going to the inn at 3.50 first.

Probably you will see Doctor Gachet this week - he has a very fine Pissarro, winter with a red house in the snow, and two fine bouquets by Cézanne.

Also another Cézanne, of the village. And I in my turn will gladly, very gladly, do a bit of brushwork here.

I told Dr. Gachet that for 4 francs a day I should think the inn he had shown me preferable, but that 6 was 2 francs too much, considering the expenses that I have. It was useless for him to say that I should be quieter there, enough is enough.

His house is full of black antiques, black, black, black, except for the impressionist pictures mentioned. Nevertheless, he is a strange fellow. The impression he made on me was not unfavourable. When he spoke of

Belgium and the days of the old painters, his grief-hardened face became smiling again, and I really think that I shall go on being friends with him and that I shall do his portrait.

Then he said that I must work boldly on, and not think at all of what went wrong with me.

In Paris I felt very strongly that all the noise there was not for me.

I am so glad to have seen Jo and the little one and your apartment, which is certainly better than the other one.

Wishing you good luck and health and hoping to see you again soon, good handshakes,

Vincent

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 2 June 1890**

Paris, 2 June 1890

My dear Vincent,

I was kept very busy last week by that Raffaelli exhibition; we stayed open as late as ten o'clock at night. If it hadn't been for that I should have answered your last letter sooner. I hope you will like the country, and that the boardinghouse is a good one.

At Mother Siron's at Barbizon one paid 5 francs, and 4.50 francs if one stayed for any length of time, and it was excellent. When I was at Auvers I dined with my friend Martin at an inn in the low-lying plain. I think there was first the Oise, and then fields and the highroad, and at the side of this road there was the inn. One dined there very well at the time, and it was not expensive. At some time or other I shall have to go there, and I shall be pleased to lend a willing ear to your proposal to come with Jo and the little one, for I am feeling rather exhausted, and the country will do me good. But we shall also have to go see Mother and Jo's parents. If I could get a vacation of three weeks or thereabouts, we should first go to you and after that to Holland. This will probably be in the beginning of August. It would be a good thing for all us to be in the country for a while. What you write me about Dr. Gachet interests me a good deal. I hope you will become friends.

I should like very much to have a friend who is a doctor, for one wishes to know at any given moment, especially on account of the little one, the cause of those fits of depression and indisposition. Fortunately he is quite well, but precisely eight days ago we went to St. Cloud, and there we were overtaken by a cloudburst such as I have never seen. The café where we took refuge was flooded; there was a foot of water. This and the hurry of jostling at night to catch the train made us uneasy, but all he had was a severe cold in the head, and Jo had nothing wrong with her, though her milk might have been spoiled - this may be caused by wet feet.

A package from St. Rémy which I had sent you came back here. Dr. Peyron advised me of it, and inquired after you. If you were here the little one would stir you up gently. How free a baby's smile is from all preoccupation.

A cordial handshake and kindest regards from Jo and the little one,

Theo





289. *Houses at Auvers*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 60.6 x 73 cm.  
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo.





290. *Old Vineyard with Peasant Woman*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, May 1890.  
Brush in oil and watercolour,  
pencil on laid paper, 44 x 54 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



291. *The Cottages*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, late May 1890.  
Pencil and watercolour, 45 x 54.5 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.



292. *Farms near Auvers*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, July 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50.2 x 100.3 cm.  
Tate Gallery, London.



**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 15 June 1890**

Paris, 15 June 1890

My dear Vincent,

I am very pleased to see that the news about yourself goes on being good, and that the courage to do your work is far from leaving you.

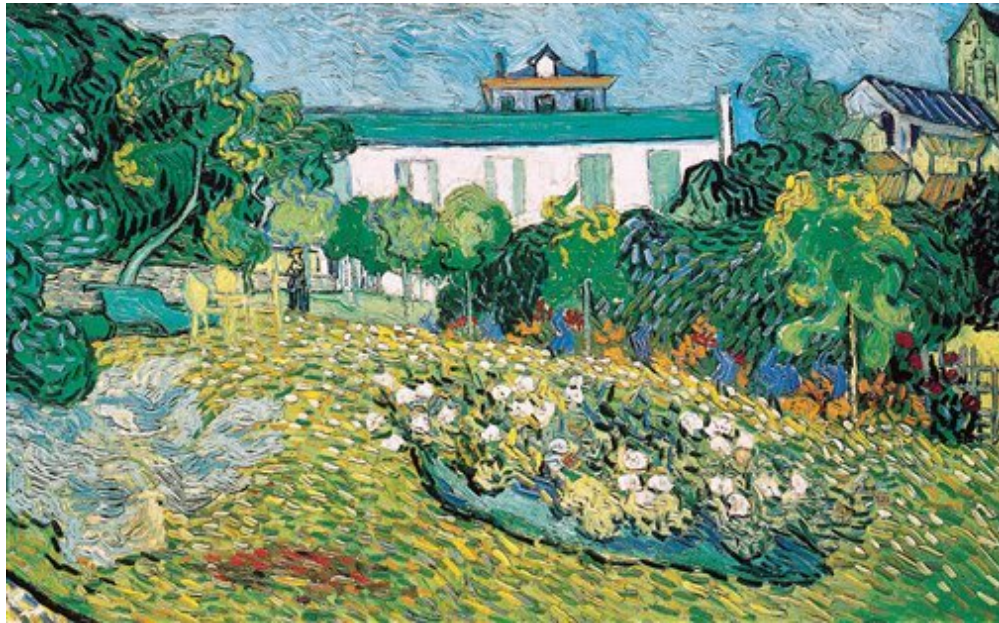
Today Tasset is going to send you the paints you ordered. The other day Tanguy told me that Tasset's tubes were much shorter and therefore contained less paint than his. If this should be the case, please tell me, for then I could make use of it to get a reduction in price. It will be much easier for you when your furniture has arrived, for then you might be able to get a comrade to stay with you too. There is a Dutchman who is going to call on you; he was recommended by De Bock [\[132\]](#), who had advised him to go to Fontainebleau, but he doesn't like it. I don't know if he has any talent; he had nothing to show me.

Lauzet came yesterday morning to see your pictures; he is very busy with his Monticellis, which are to appear within some ten days. He likes the "Portrait of a Woman" which you did at Arles very much. As regards his [Gauguin's] project with reference to Martinique, perhaps it is what he needs, but if it depends wholly on a payment to be made to an inventory, it is not very certain yet. Herewith enclosed you will find a letter from him, which he asked me to send on to you. Staying with Schuffenecker doesn't do him any good; he is hardly doing any work, whereas Brittany inspires him. So it is right that he should go away.

I give you Jo's greetings; I must hurry to finish this letter, otherwise it will not go off today. She is a little indisposed, but I hope it is nothing serious.

Cordial handshake.

Theo



293. *Daubigny's Garden*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June-July 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 53 x 104 cm.  
Museum of Art, Hiroshima.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 24 or 25 June 1890**

My dear Theo,

Many thanks for your letter and for the 50-franc note it contained. The exchange you have made with Bock is very good, and I am very curious to see what he is doing now.

I hope that Jo is better, as you say that she has been indisposed. Certainly you must come here as soon as possible; nature is very, very beautiful here and I am longing to see you all again.

M. Peyron wrote to me two days ago, enclosed is his letter. I told him that I thought about 10 francs for the servants would be enough.

The canvases have arrived now from there; the irises are quite dry and I hope you will find something in it, and there are also the roses, a field of wheat, a little canvas with mountains and finally a cypress with a star.

This week I have done a portrait of a girl of about 16, in blue against a blue background, the daughter of the people I am lodging with. I have given her this portrait, but I made a variant of it for you, a size 15 canvas.

Then I have a long canvas one meter by just 50 centimeters high, of wheat fields, and one which makes a pendant, of undergrowth, lilac poplar trunks and below them grass with flowers, pink, yellow, white and various greens. Lastly, an evening effect - two pear trees all black against a yellowing sky, with some wheat, and in the violet background the château surrounded by somber greenery.

The Dutchman works quite diligently, but still has many illusions about the originality of his way of seeing things. He is doing studies somewhat like those Koning did, a little grey, a little green, with a red roof and a whitish road.

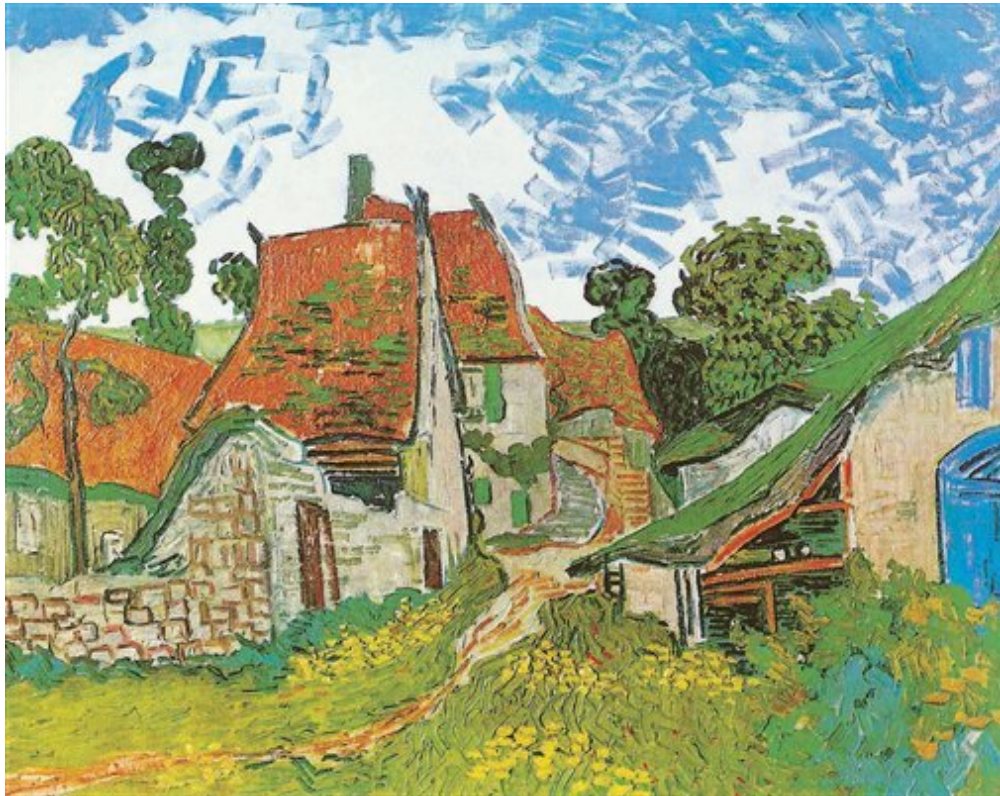
What is one to say in a case like this? If he has money, then certainly he would do well to paint, but if he has to intrigue a lot to make sales, I pity him because he does paintings like the others because they buy them at a relatively excessive price. He will get there though, if only he works diligently every day. But alone or with painters who work little, he won't come to much, I think.

I hope to do the portrait of Mlle. Gachet next week, and perhaps I shall have a country girl pose too. I am glad that Bock made that exchange with

me, for I find that, between friends, they paid a bit too much for the other canvas.

A little later on I should very much like to come to Paris for several days just to go and look up Quost and Jeannin and one or two others. I should very much like you to have a Quost, and there might probably be some way of exchanging one. Gachet came today to look at the canvases of the Midi. Good luck with the little one and a good handshake in thought to you and Jo.

[No signature]



294. *Street at Auvers*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm.  
Ateneumin Taidemuseo, Helsinki.





295. *The Staircase at Auvers with Two Figures*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, May-June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 20.5 x 26 cm.  
Hiroshima Museum of Art, Hiroshima.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 28 June 1890**

My dear Theo,

You should send the enclosed order for paints at the beginning of the month, anyway at the most convenient time, there is no hurry, a few days sooner or later don't matter.

Yesterday and the day before I painted Mlle. Gachet's portrait, which I hope you will see soon; the dress is pink, the wall in the background green with orange spots, the carpet red with green spots, the piano dark violet; it is 1 metre high by 50 cm wide.

It is a figure that I painted with pleasure - but it is difficult.

He has promised to make her pose for me another time at the small organ. I will do one for you - I have noticed that this canvas goes very well with another horizontal one of wheat, as one canvas is vertical and in pink tones, the other pale green and greenish yellow, the complementary of pink; but we are still far from the time when people will understand the curious relation between one fragment of nature and another, which all the same explain each other and enhance each other. But some certainly feel it, and that's something.

And then there is this improvement, that in clothes you see combinations of very pretty light colours; if you could make the people you are walking past pose and do their portraits, it would be as pretty as any period whatever in the past, and I even think that often in nature there is actually all the grace of a picture by Puvis, between art and nature. For instance, yesterday I saw two figures: the mother in a gown of deep carmine, the daughter in pale pink with a yellow hat without any ornament, very healthy country faces, browned by fresh air, burned by the sun; the mother especially had a very, very red face and black hair and two diamonds in her ears. And I thought again of that canvas by Delacroix, "L'Éducation Maternelle." For in the expression of the faces there was really everything that there was in the head of George Sand. Do you know that there is a portrait - "Bust of George Sand" - by Delacroix, there is a wood engraving of it in L'Illustration, with short hair.

A good handshake in thought for you and Jo and good luck with the little one.

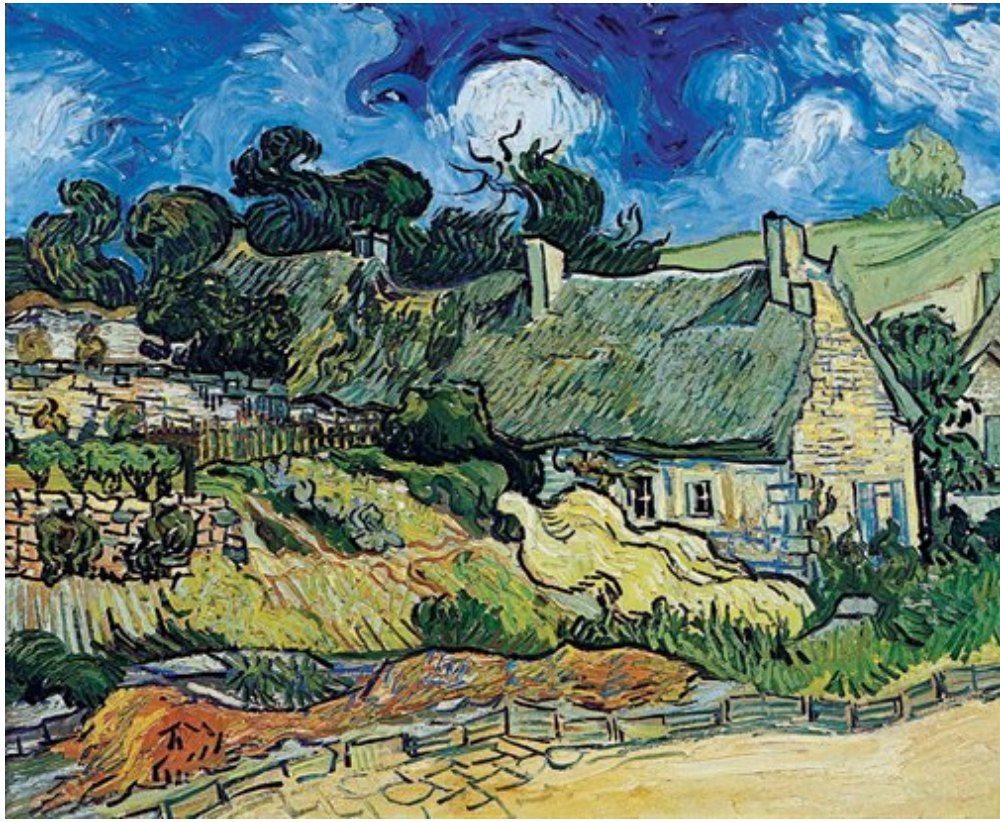
Ever yours, Vincent

[The original letter is missing; the text here is from a copy of the letter in Johanna's handwriting. The sketch Vincent drew of Mlle. Gachet at the piano, F 2049, is recorded, but its location (presumably with the rest of the original letter) is unknown. Jo's copy has just a blank rectangle in its place.]



296. *Farmhouse with Two Figures*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, July 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 38 x 45 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.





297. *Thatched Cottages of Cordeville at Auvers-sur-Oise*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 72 x 91 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 30 June 1890**

Paris, 30 June 1890

My dearest brother,

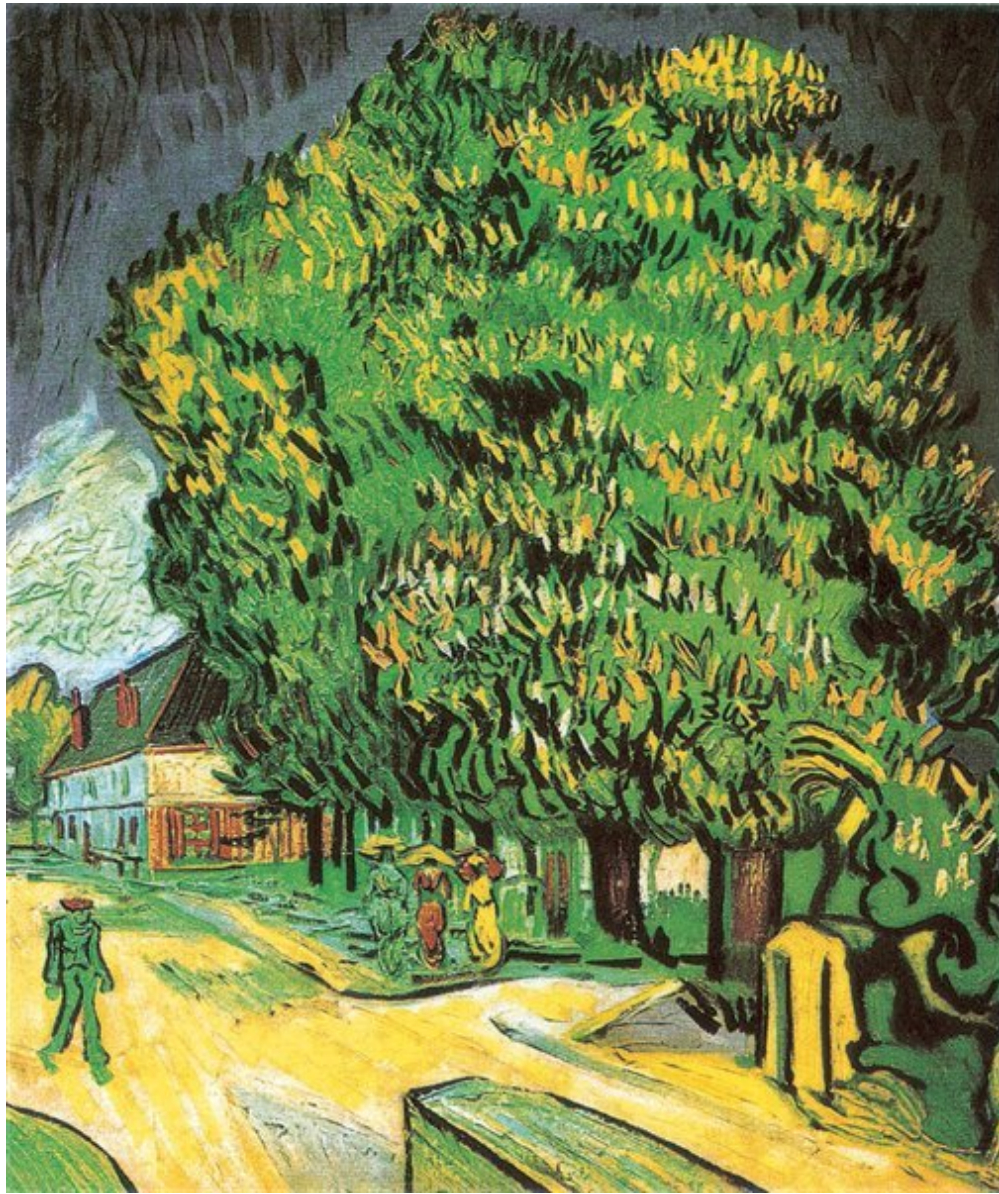
We have gone through a period of the greatest anxiety; our dear little boy has been very ill, but fortunately the doctor, who was uneasy himself, told Jo, "You are not going to lose the child because of this". Here in Paris the best milk you can buy is downright poison. We are now giving him ass's milk, and this is doing him good, but you never heard anything so grievously distressing as this almost continuous plaintive crying all through many days and many nights, when you don't know what to do, and all you do seems to aggravate his sufferings. It's not that the milk isn't fresh, but what is wrong is the fodder and the treatment of the cows. It's abominable. You can well imagine how happy we are that it is going better. Jo was admirable, which you can imagine too. A true mother, but for all that she wore herself out a good deal too much; may she recover her strength and not be subjected to new trials. Fortunately she is asleep at the moment, but she is moaning in her sleep, and there is nothing I can do for her. If only the baby, who is sleeping too, will let her sleep for some hours, both of them will wake up with a smile, at least I hope so. In general she is having a hard time of it at the moment.

At present we do not know what we ought to do; there are problems. Ought we to take another apartment - you know, on the first floor of the same house? Ought we to go to Auvers, to Holland, or not? Ought I to live without a thought for the morrow, and when I work all day long not earn enough to protect that good Jo from worries over money matters, as those rats Boussod and Valadon are treating me as though I just entered their business, and are keeping me on a short allowance? Oughtn't I to be calculating, if I spend nothing on extras and am short of money - oughtn't I to tell them how matters stand, and if they should dare refuse me, oughtn't I to tell them at last, Gentlemen, I am going to take the plunge, and establish myself as a private dealer in my own house?

While writing I think I came to the conclusion that this is my duty, and that if Mother, or Jo, or you or I myself should resign ourselves to starvation, it won't be of the slightest service to us - on the contrary. What would be the

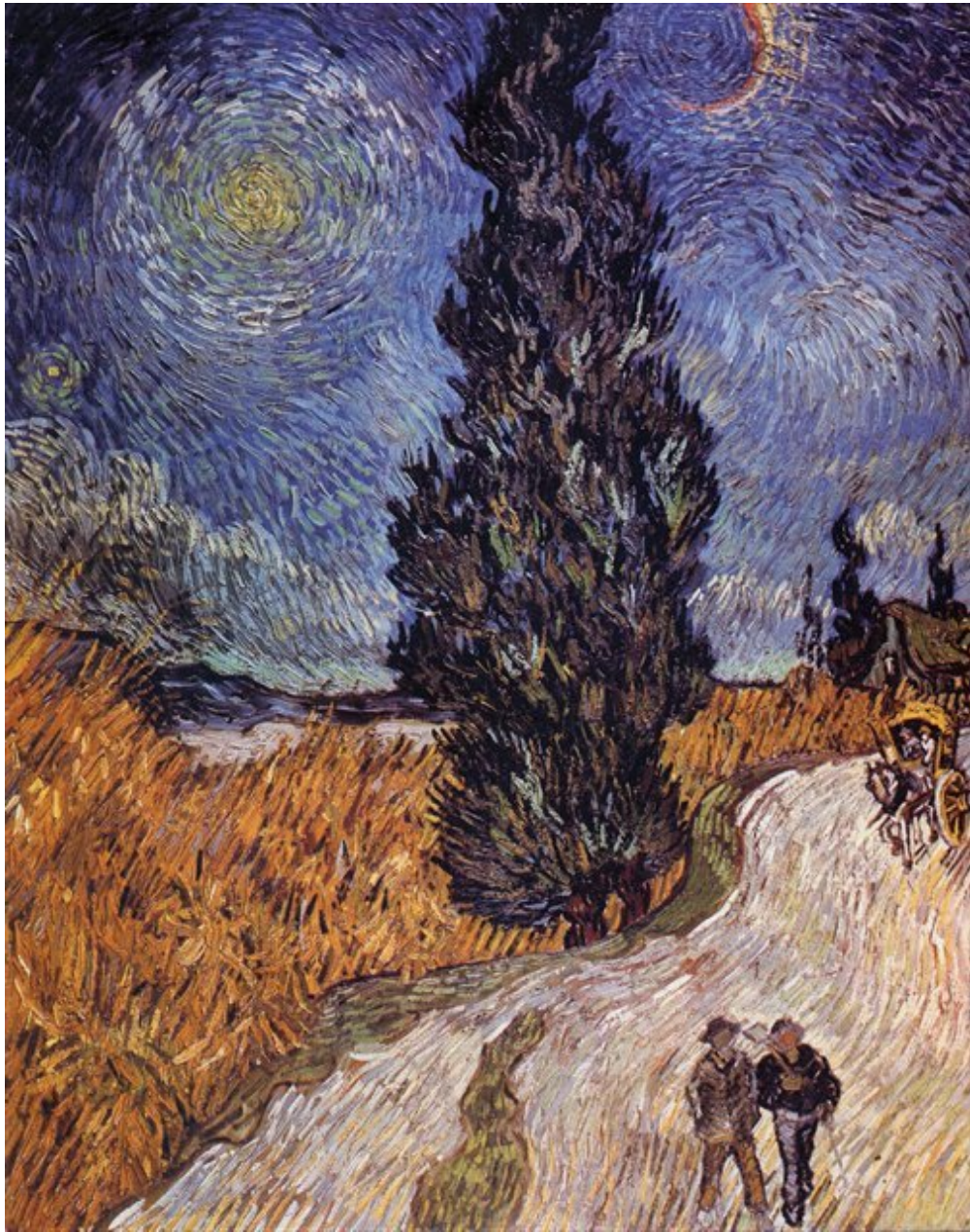
good of you and me going through the world like a pair of down-and-out beggars with nothing to eat? On the contrary, by keeping up our courage, and by living, all of us, sustained by our mutual love and mutual esteem, we shall make better headway, and we shall be able to fulfill our duty and our task with much greater security than if we were to weigh every mouthful of bread. What do you have to say to this, old fellow?

Don't bother your head about me or about us, old fellow, but remember that what gives me the greatest pleasure is the knowledge that you are in good health and that you are busy with your work, which is admirable. You have too much ardor as it is, and we shall be ready for battle for a long time to come yet, for we shall have to battle all through life without eating the oats of charity they give to old horses in the mansions of the great. We shall draw the plow until our strength forsakes us, and we shall still look with admiration at the sun or the moon, according to the hour.



298. *Chestnut Tree in Bloom*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 70 x 58 cm.  
Private Collection, South America.





299. *Country Road in Provence by Night*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, c. 12-15 May 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm.  
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo.

We like this better than being put into an armchair and rubbing our legs like the old merchant at Auvers. Look here, old boy, watch your health as much as you can, and I shall do the same, for we have too much in our noodles to forget the daisies and the lumps of earth freshly cast up by the plough, neither do we forget the branches of the shrubs which put forth buds in spring, or the bare branches of the trees shivering in winter, nor the limpid blue of the serene skies, nor the big clouds of autumn, nor the uniformly grey sky in winter, nor the sun rising over our aunts' garden, nor the red sun going down into the sea at Scheveningen, nor the moon and stars of a fine night in summer or winter - no, come what may, this is our profession.

Is this enough? No - I have, and I hope from the bottom of my heart that you too will someday have, - a wife to whom you will be able to say these things; and as for me - whose mouth is so often closed, and whose head is so often empty - it is from her that I receive the germs, which in all probability come from afar, but which were found by our beloved father and mother - perhaps they will grow so that at least I may become a man, and who knows whether my son, if he can stay alive and if I can help him - who knows whether he will not grow up to be Somebody. As for you, you have found your way, old fellow, your carriage is steady on its wheels and strong, and I am seeing my way, thanks to my dear wife. Take it easy, you, and hold your horses a little, so that there may be no accident, and as for me, an occasional lash of the whip would do me no harm.

Your portrait of Miss Gachet must be admirable, and I shall be happy to see it with those spots of orange in the background. The sketch of the landscape makes me think of something exquisite. I am anxious to see it. That letter from father Peyron was good. After all, these people are of sterling quality. Now listen, as soon as Jo is a little stronger and the little one entirely recovered, you must come and stay with us for a day or two, at least on a Sunday and some days after. The Salons are closed, but it will not be much of a loss to you, for we shall go see the Quost together, and it is decidedly a fine picture. We are going to ask him if I can display it in the show window on the Boulevard, at least if it's not too large. But it must be possible, and there will also be one of your things, old fellow. It is only fair that the two of you should be together, for it was you who drew my attention to that beautiful picture of Quost's. Do you know that I sold that fine picture by Corot, and that those duffers Boussod and Valadon said it could not be

sold? Well, Tersteeg sold it to Mesdag at a profit of 5000 and Mesdag is so pleased with it that he wants to buy other ones like it, and he has written to Arnold & Trip asking them to look out for similar pieces.

Good-by, dear old brother, the paints are going off. I shake your hand most cordially, and I am glad that the little one and his mummy are sleeping soundly.

Yours, Theo



300. *Wheat Field with Crows*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 103 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 2 July 1890**

My dear Theo and dear Jo,

I have just received the letter in which you say that the child is ill; I should greatly like to come and see you, and what holds me back is the thought that I should be even more powerless than you in the present state of anxiety. But I feel how dreadful it must be and I wish I could help you.

I am afraid of increasing the confusion by coming immediately. But I share your anxiety with all my heart. It is a great pity that M. Gachet's house is so encumbered with all sorts of things. But for that, I think that it would be a good plan to come and stay here - with him - with the little one, for a full month at least. I think that country air has an enormous effect. In this very street there are youngsters who were born in Paris and were really sickly - who, however, are doing well now. It would also be possible to come to the inn, it's true. So that you should not be too much alone, I should come to you myself for a week or fortnight. That would not increase the expenses.

As for the little one, really, I am beginning to fear that it will be necessary to give him fresh air and, even more, the little bustle of other children that a village has. I think Jo, too, who shares our anxieties and risks, ought to have a change of air in the country from time to time.

Rather a gloomy letter from Gauguin, he talks vaguely of definitely having decided on Madagascar, but so vaguely that you can see that he is only thinking of this because he really does not know what else to think of.

And carrying out the plan seems almost absurd to me.

Here are three sketches - one of a peasant woman, big yellow hat with a knot of sky-blue ribbons, very red face, rich blue blouse with orange spots, background of ears of wheat.

It is a size 30 canvas, but I'm afraid it's really a bit coarse. Then the horizontal landscape with fields, like one of Michel's, but then the colour is soft green, yellow and green-blue.

Then the undergrowth around poplars, violet trunks running across the landscape, perpendicular like columns; the depths of the wood are blue and at the bottom of the big trunks, the grassy ground full of flowers, white, pink, yellow and green, long grass turning russet, and flowers.

The people at the inn here used to live in Paris, where they were constantly unwell, parents and children; here they never have anything wrong with them at all, especially the youngest one, who came when he was two months old, and then the mother had difficulty nursing him, whereas here everything came right almost at once. On the other hand, you work all day, and at present you probably hardly sleep. I honestly believe that Jo would have twice as much milk here, and that when she comes here, you will be able to do without cows, donkeys and other quadrupeds. And as for Jo - so that she should have some company in the daytime - well, she could stay right opposite old Gachet's house, perhaps you remember that there is an inn just across the way at the bottom of the hill?





301. *Wheat Fields with a Reaper*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, July 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73.6 x 93 cm.  
Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo.



302. *Landscape of Auvers in the Rain*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, July 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50.3 x 100.2 cm.  
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.



What can I say about a future perhaps, perhaps, without the Boussods?  
[133]

That will be as it may, you have not spared yourself trouble for them, you have served them with exemplary loyalty at all times.

I myself am also trying to do as well as I can, but I will not conceal from you that I hardly dare count on always being in good health. And if my disease returns, you would forgive me. I still love art and life very much, but as for ever having a wife of my own, I have no great faith in that. I rather fear that toward say forty - or rather say nothing - I declare I know nothing, absolutely nothing as to what turn this may take. But I am writing to you at once because I think that you must not be unreasonably worried about the little one; if it's just that he's cutting teeth, well, to make the job easier for him, it would perhaps be possible to distract him with more here where there are children, and animals, and flowers, and fresh air. I shake your hand and Jo's in thought and a kiss for the little one.

Ever yours, Vincent

An Englishman, an Australian, named Walpole Brooke, will probably come to see you, he lives at 16 Rue de la Grande Chaumière - I told him that you would let him know when he could come to see the canvases that are at your place.

He will probably show you some of his studies, which are still rather smeary, but all the same he does observe nature. He has been here at Auvers for some months and we've sometimes gone out together. He was brought up in Japan, you would not know it to look at his painting - but that may come.

Thanks for the package of paints, for the 50-fr. note, and the article on the Independents.

[Sketches enclosed with letter: Girl with Straw Hat, Wheat Field and Undergrowth with Two Figures.]



303. *Sheaves of Wheat*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, July 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 101 cm.  
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 3 July 1890**

Paris, 3 July 1890

My dear Vincent,

Many thanks for your letter. Happily, mine contains good news of the little one. After some days of suffering he is beginning to be merry again and not to cry so much. This is due to the good ass's milk we are giving him now. The animals come to the door, and in the morning he gets warm milk, always from the same animal. After that there remains enough for two portions which he gets alternately with his mother's milk, which is now coming in abundance. At the moment he is looking very well.

It is necessary for him to take ass's milk for at least 15 days, so we shall not be able to go visit Pissarro on July 14. Therefore I have reserved this day to go see Claude Monet with Valadon, who will be sure to annoy me that day, but I am glad to be going to see the new works by Monet.

There is no reason for you to put off your visit - not that we didn't appreciate your willingness to come share our troubles; on the contrary; many thanks for that, but with a patient in the house the fewer visitors the better. So come if you want on Sunday by the first train; in the morning you will see Walpole Brook, who has just seen your paintings at Tanguy's. Afterwards we are going to look at a Japanese Buddha that I have seen at a curio dealer's, and then will lunch at home and look at your studies with you. You can stay with us as long as you like, and you can advise us with regard to the arrangement of our new apartment.

Probably Dries and Annie will take the ground floor, and they will have a little garden, of which we shall make good use, of course. If the two women can hit it off, it promises well. It is quite possible that Dries will join us. I have been quite lucky in business, although my painting sales do not amount to 800,000,000,000 frs., but among other things I have sold two Gauguins, for which I sent him the money. Pissarro wrote to tell me that he could not pay his rent; I shall send him a little advance upon the business we are going to do. It is true, his exhibition brought in something, but it is only enough to plug the leaks. He has an abscess in one eye. Poor old fellow.

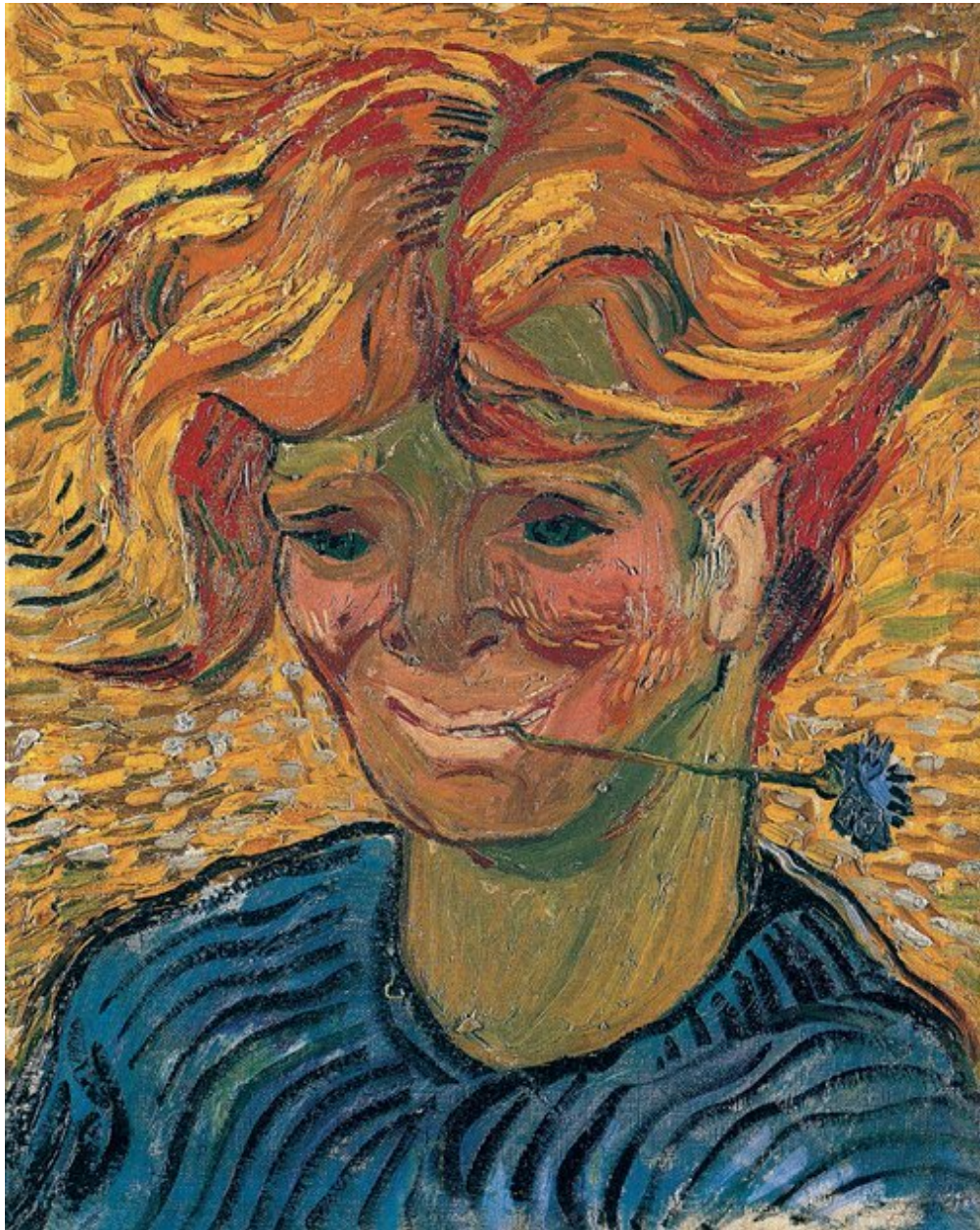
Good-by, brother, we count on seeing you on Sunday. Kindest regards from Jo, and the little one is smiling as before his illness. A cordial

handshake from your brother who loves you.

Theo

Regards to Dr. Gachet and family.

The sketch of the landscape in the manner of Michel is promising [JH 2039], and the portrait must be superb.



304. *Man with Cornflower*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June-July 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 39 x 30.5 cm. Private Collection.





305. *Child with an Orange*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, late June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50 x 51 cm. Private Collection.

**Letter from Vincent van Gogh to His Mother  
Auvers-sur-Oise, c. 10-14 July 1890**

[Written at the top of this letter in his mother's handwriting was "Very last letter from Auvers."]

Dear Mother and sister,

Many thanks for your excellent letters, which gave me a great deal of pleasure. For the present I am feeling much calmer than last year, and really the restlessness in my head has greatly quieted down. In fact, I have always believed that seeing the surroundings of the old days would have this effect.

I often think of you both, and should very much like to see you once again.

It is good that Wil went to work in the hospital, and that she says that the operations were not as bad as she expected, because she appreciates the means of lessening the pain and also the efforts of the many physicians to do what has to be done, simply and intelligently and kindly - well, that is what I call looking at things sensibly - and trustingly.

But for one's health, as you say, it is very necessary to work in the garden and to see the flowers growing. I myself am quite absorbed in that immense plain with wheat fields up as far as the hills, boundless as the ocean, delicate yellow, delicate soft green, the delicate purple of a tilled and weeded piece of ground, with the regular speckle of the green of flowering potato plants, everything under a sky of delicate tones of blue, white, pink and violet. I am in a mood of almost too much calm, just the mood needed for painting this.

I sincerely hope that you will spend very happy days with Theo and Jo, and you will see, as I did, how well they take care of the little child, who is looking well.

Anna's children must be quite big now.

Goodbye for today, I have to go out to work.

In thought embraced by,

Your loving Vincent

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 14 July 1890**

Paris, 14 July 1890

My dear brother,

We are very happy that you are not as much under the impression of the unsettled business questions as you were when you were here. Indeed, the danger is really not as serious as you believed. If only we can continue in good health, which will allow us to undertake what is growing little by little into a necessity in our minds, all will go well. Disappointments? - certainly, but we are no beginners, and we are like wagoners who by all the efforts of their horses almost reach the top of the hill, do an about-turn, and then, often with one more push, manage to gain the summit. If only we could always keep this in mind.

Today we are finishing the packing of our trunks to leave for Leyden tomorrow morning. From there I shall go to Mesdag on Wednesday to speak with him about Corot, and then to Antwerp with a picture by Diaz. Although the eight days are past now, those gentlemen have not said a word about what they intend to do with me.

Dries, on the contrary, has shown himself to be very cowardly and really under his wife's domination. He freely confessed that everything I had offered him was in order to attract him to the apartment below us, so that we could have his wife as some sort of maid. I do not believe that this came from him. However, I didn't think that his wife was as crazy as that. This is the second time that he has withdrawn at a decisive moment, and yet you were here when we spoke about it and he answered me that I could definitely count on him. I really don't understand him at all, and blame his hesitancy on his wife. That is his problem.

Enclosed are 50 francs. If I should have the good fortune to do business during my trip, it would make things still easier for me. Goodbye, old fellow; I shall probably be back after eight days.

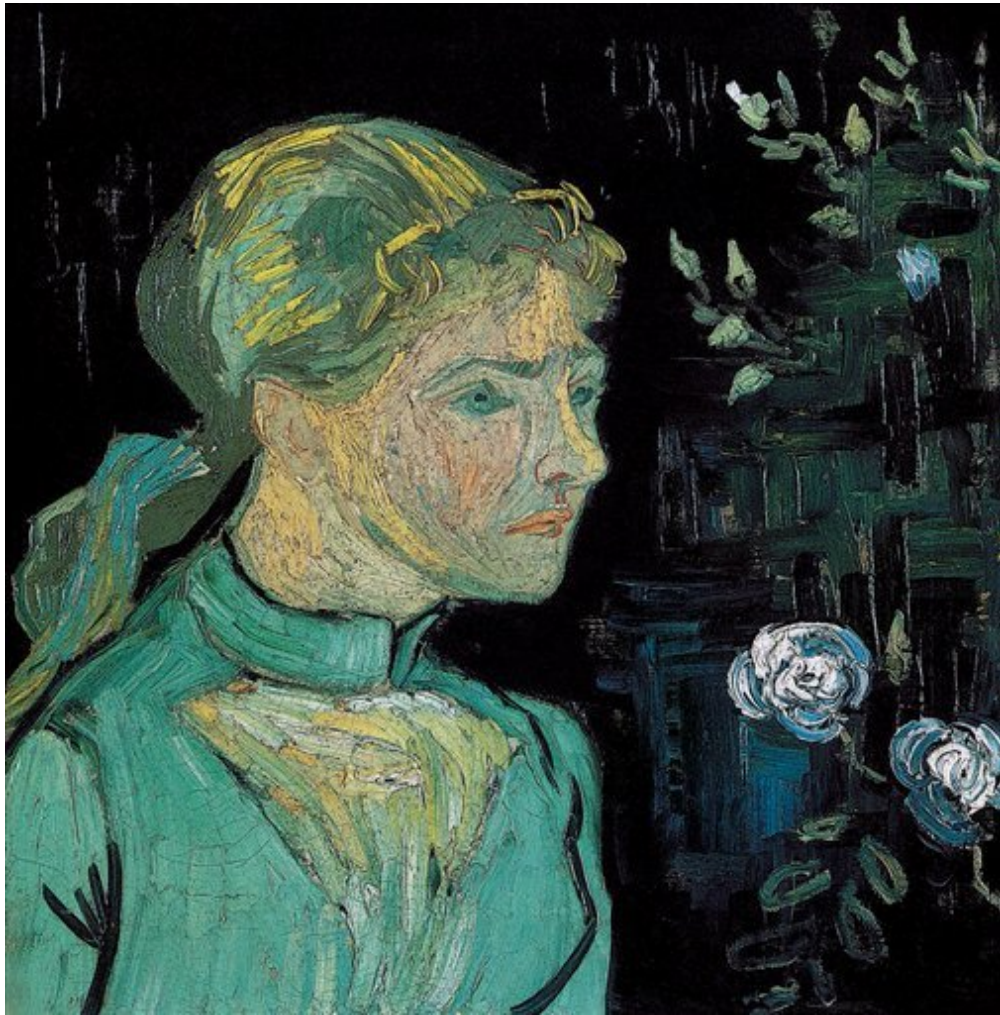
Kindest regards from Jo, and believe me your loving brother.

Theo



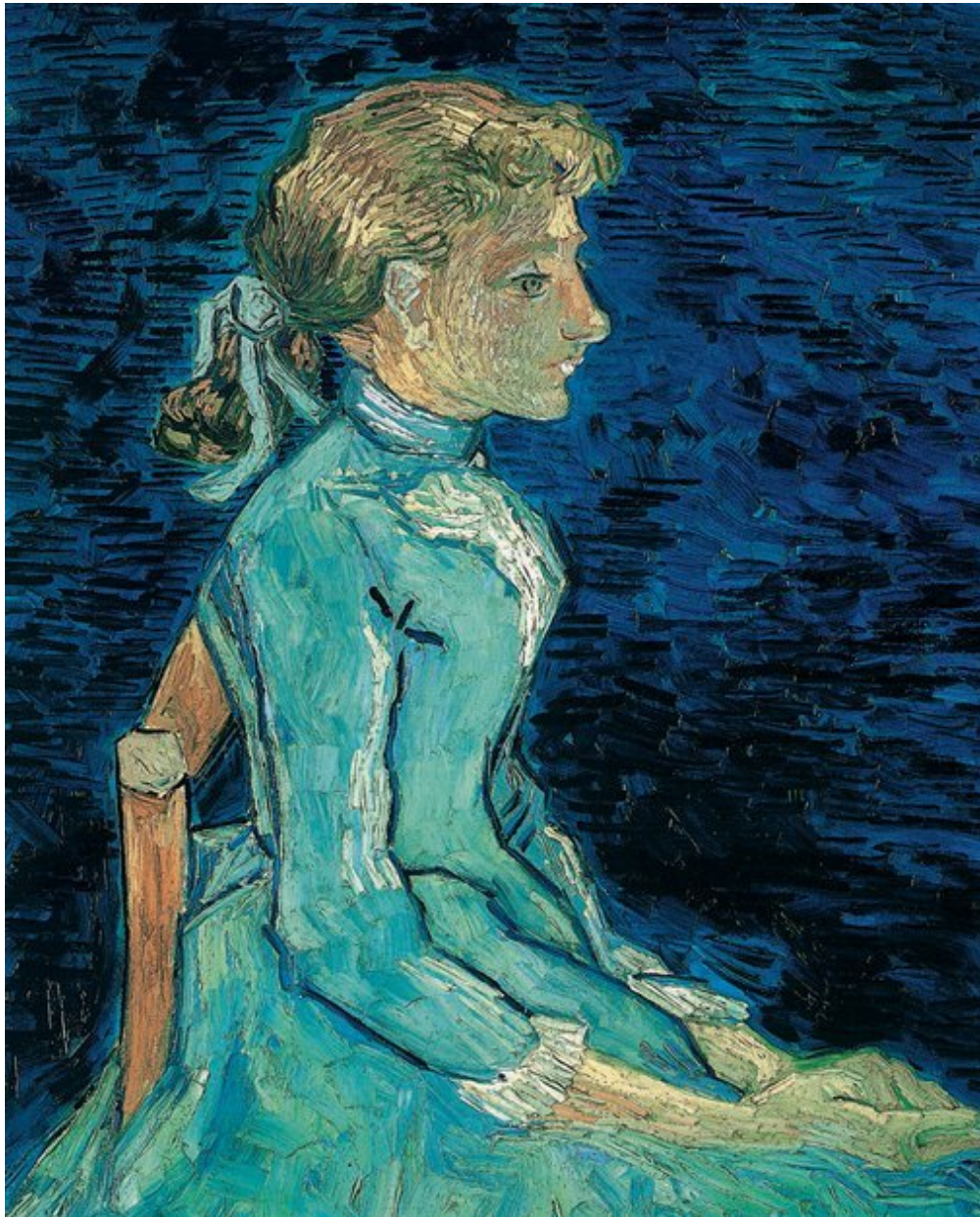


306. *Two Little Girls*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 51.2 x 51 cm.  
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



307. *Portrait of Adeline Ravoux*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 50.2 x 50.5 cm.  
The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.





308. *Portrait of Adeline Ravoux*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 67 x 55 cm.  
Private Collection, Switzerland.



309. *Pink Roses*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 32 x 40.5 cm.  
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen.

**Letter from Theo van Gogh to Vincent van Gogh**  
**Auvers-sur-Oise, 22 July 1890**

Paris, 22 July 1890 [\[134\]](#)

My dear Vincent,

Jo has sent your letter, which followed us to Holland, to me and I have read it with a little surprise[\[135\]](#). Where did you see these violent domestic quarrels? That we were very tired by these interminable preoccupations on the subject of the future of us all, yes, that with this affair vis-à-vis the house, which I am unsure is in my own best interest, yes, but truly I don't see these intense domestic quarrels that you talk about. Was it the discussion with Dries? Certainly I had hoped to see a bit more audacity in him in undertaking something, but he is like that and there is no reason to break with him. Is it perhaps, but I really do not believe it, that you consider it an intense domestic quarrel when Jo asked you not to put the Prévost[\[136\]](#) up where you wanted to hang it? She did not mean to hurt you with this and would certainly have preferred that you leave it there rather than anger you. Her child preoccupies her too much for her to have much time to think about paintings and no matter that she sees things better than she used to, she does not always understand what the painting means. No, if it was this trifling matter, I tell you to stop it because it is not worth worrying about. I hope, my dear Vincent, that your health is good, and since you say that you write with difficulty, and don't talk about your work I am a little afraid that there is something troubling you or not going right. In this case drop in to see Dr. Gachet, he will give you something to make you feel better. Give me your news as soon as possible. Last Tuesday [15 July] I took Jo and the child to Leiden and stayed there until Thursday. Mother is well, a little older, but she was so happy to see her little boy and it was fun to see her pick him up and how happy it made her. Wil is also fine and was very kind to us. Jo stayed there [again?] for a day after I left and then she went on to Amsterdam, where she is now. I hope that everyone tries a little not to be so tired, but that everyone gets a little rest; we all need it for it is a duty I assure you.

Unfortunately, the weather there, as it is here, is unsettled, with the result that she cannot get much fresh air, nor can the child either. I think that if it were possible she wants to return home sooner than we had planned, but on the other hand it is good that she likes her home here more than her parent's

house. I will be very happy when she returns because the house is so empty! And the little one misses me too. Our lives, justified by this child, are so closely linked that you do not have to fear that a small difference of opinion, if you saw any, would cause any rift that would be difficult to reconcile. Therefore, don't think about it any more. My travelling in Holland has done me good, and has given me a lot of rest, which I really needed. Hope the health is good. Enclosed I send you 50-fr. - write to me quickly and believe me your brother who loves you,

Theo



## **Letter from Vincent van Gogh to Theo van Gogh**

### **Auvers-sur-Oise, 23 July 1890**

[Jo's note: "This letter, evidently his penultimate one to Theo, was found on Vincent's body after his suicide on the 27th." There is a note at the top in Theo's handwriting on it: "Letter he was carrying on him July 29". In fact, it is obviously a rough draught of letter 651].

My dear brother,

Thanks for your kind letter and for the 50 Fr. note it contained

There are many things I should like to write you about, but I feel it is pointless. I hope you have found these gentlemen favorably disposed toward you.

Your reassuring me as to the state of peace of your household was not worth the trouble, I think, having seen the other side of it for myself. And I quite agree with you that rearing a boy on a fourth floor is a hell of a job for you as well as Jo.

Since it is going well, which is the main thing, I should insist on things of less importance. My word, before we have a chance of talking business more calmly, there is probably a long way to go. That is all I want to say, that I noted it with a certain fright and I cannot hide it. But that is all there is to it.

The other painters, whatever they think of it, instinctively keep themselves at a distance from discussions about actual trade.

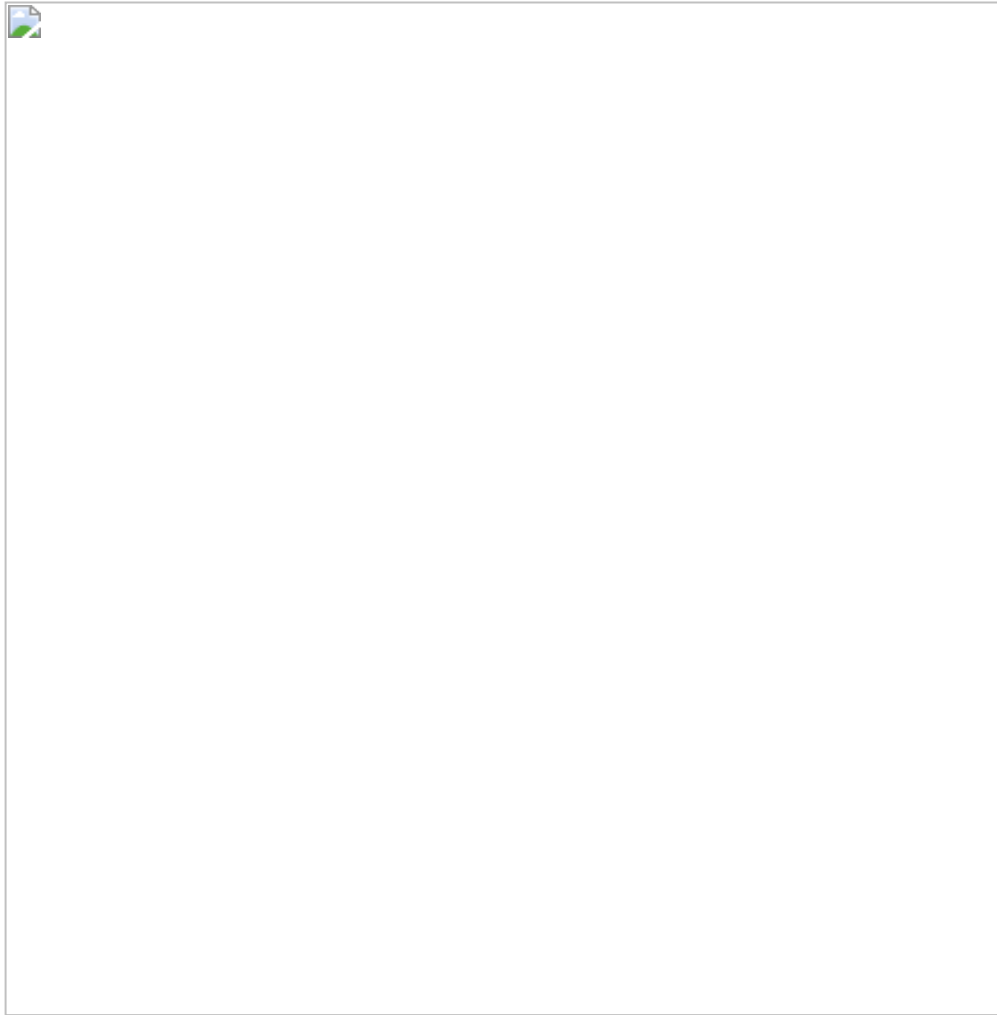
Well, the truth is, we cannot speak other than by our paintings. But still, my dear brother, there is this that I have always told you, and I repeat it once more with all the earnestness that can be imparted by an effort of a mind diligently fixed on trying to do as well as one can - I tell you again that I shall always consider that you are something other than a simple dealer in Corots, that through my mediation you have your part in the actual production of some canvases, which even in the cataclysm retain their calm.

For this is what we have got to, and this is all or at least the chief thing that I can have to tell you at a moment of comparative crisis. At a moment when things are very strained between dealers in paintings by dead artists, and living artists.

Well, my work to me, I risk my life on it, and my reason has half foundered - all right - but you are not one of those dealers in men, as far as I

know, and you can take sides, I find, truly acting with humanity, but what is the use?





310. *Japanese Vase with Roses and Anemones*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 51 x 51 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



311. *Almond Blossom*,  
Auvers-sur-Oise, February 1890.  
Oil on canvas, 73.5 x 92 cm.  
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

## ***Biography***

1853

Vincent van Gogh is born on the 30th March at Groot Zunder, in the south of Holland, not far from the Belgian border. Son of the vicar Theodotus van Gogh and Anna van Gogh-Carbentus, he is the oldest of the family's six children. He is given the name of his brother who had been stillborn exactly one year previously.

1857

His brother Theodorus is born on the 1st of May. Van Gogh is particularly close throughout his life with Theodorus, and the two maintain a long correspondence.

1869

He is hired by his uncle in the Goupil and Co. Gallery in the Hague and becomes acquainted with 19th century English art and the works of the Barbizon school, as well as with 17th century Flemish painting (particularly with Rembrandt).

1872

This year marks the beginning of the correspondence with his brother Theo, which lasted throughout their lives.

1873

He joins the London branch of Goupil. In London he suffers his first deceptive encounter with love in the face of Ursula, his landlady's daughter, who rejects him.

1874

In October, he is sent to the Goupil gallery centre in Paris, where he lives isolated and devotes himself to the study of the Bible.

1876

He is dismissed from the Goupil's centre for negligence and returns to England, where he works as a teacher and then as a vicar's assistant.

1877

Van Gogh returns to Amsterdam to prepare himself for entering the Theology Faculty.

1878

After having abandoned his entry to the Theology faculty, he fails to become a vicar.

1879

By order of the Evangelist Church of Brussels, van Gogh finally gains permission to work as a vicar for six months at Wasme. But his contract is not prolonged because of his almost fanatical zeal. He falls into a depression and severs all ties with his family for nine months.

1880

After many failures, van Gogh begins his artistic career. He goes to Brussels, studies anatomy and perspective and works in the studio of the Dutch painter van Rappard.

### **The Hague period 1881-1883:**

1881

He returns to his parents' home in Etten and improves his drawing. But he falls in love with his cousin Kee Vos-Stricker, who rejects him violently, and he falls once more into a depression. At the end of this year he goes to the Hague and enters the studio of Anton Mauve. Mauve soon dismisses him because of his unstable behaviour. Even though he lives off the pension sent to him monthly by his brother Theo, van Gogh takes Clasina Maria Hornik, also known as Sien, under his wing. She was a pregnant prostitute abandoned with her five-year-old child.

1882

A short period of optimism and continuous work is followed by yet another depression, when Sien leaves him. Still, during his Hague period, van Gogh created almost 200 designs (60 of which are in pencil and 30 in watercolour), mostly Dutch landscapes and portraits of Sien.

### **The Nuenen period 1883-1885:**

1883

After a time of solitude and depression, he decides to return to his parents who are now living in Nuenen and he sets up his studio in the laundry.

1884

Margot Beggeman and Vincent van Gogh meet and decide to marry. Their parents' opposition to this marriage drives Margot to suicide. Van Gogh saves her at the last minute but is profoundly shocked. At that time he gives courses to some amateur artists.

1885

His father dies abruptly from a heart attack. His work begins to be appreciated in Paris. In November he leaves Nuenen for Anvers. This period is one of the most prolific ones, and he paints one of his masterpieces, "The Potato Eaters", showing the humility, hard work and poverty of the farmers. He discovers the art of Rubens, his palette becomes lighter and he starts applying flat colour after seeing the Japanese prints.

### **The Paris period 1886-1888:**

He moves with his brother Theo to Paris. The artist frequents the art gallery of Julien Tanguy (often called the Brother Tanguy). But from 1887 Vincent's brother is increasingly worried by his irritability. Under the influence of the impressionists (notably Monet, Sisley and Renoir), the palette becomes lighter. He becomes friends with the painter Pissarro.

### **The Arles period 1888-1890:**

1888

Van Gogh moves to Arles. He is stimulated by the blazing sun and the brilliance of the Province colours. He will execute more than two hundred paintings in two years. From May he stays in the 'Yellow House'. Gauguin joins him in October but their differences lead to disputes in matters of art set them apart and their relations deteriorate. In December, after a violent dispute with Gauguin, van Gogh cuts off his ear lobe, wraps it in newspaper and sends it to a prostitute called Rachel. He is hospitalised, and Gauguin leaves horrified.

1889

Suffering from fits of madness, van Gogh voluntarily enters the asylum of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, where he will stay for a year. Even though interrupted with depression crises, this period was a very important one for the art of van Gogh from an artistic point of view. He creates some of his masterpieces, often featuring landscapes and olive trees.

1890

Van Gogh participates in the Salon of Independent artists in Paris with ten works. He moves to Auvers-sur-Oise and is treated by the doctor Gachet who is also an amateur painter. He feels he is a burden to his brother and his behaviour becomes once more troublesome. On July 27th van Gogh shoots himself in the chest, and dies on the morning of the 29th with Theo by his side.

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[A Pair of Shoes](#)

[A Pair of Shoes](#)

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Wooden Sheds

Vincent

# Notes

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- [1] Aurier, Albert: "The isolated ones: Vincent van Gogh". In: *Van Gogh. A Retrospective*. Edited by Susan Alyson Stein. New York 1988, p. 191.
- [2] Aurier, p.191.
- [3] Aurier, p.191.
- [4] Aurier, p.191.
- [5] Aurier, p.193.
- [6] Arnold, Matthias: *Vincent van Gogh. Biographie*, München 1993, p.1011; my translation.
- [7] L 164, in: The complete letters of Vincent van Gogh, Boston 1978, I: 285.
- [8] L 476, in: The complete letters..., II: 544.
- [9] L 641a, in: The complete letters..., III: 282.
- [10] This was Willem Valkes, a cousin of the Roos family and a fellow boarder with Vincent.
- [11] Goupil had three branches in Paris; the main branch was on the Rue Chaptal, another on Boulevard Montmartre, of which Theo became the head later on, and a third branch was on the Place de l'Opera.
- [12] Lies, an abbreviation for their sister Elisabeth.
- [13] Madame Tussaud's Wax Works.
- [14] A popular Dutch preacher-poet. Both poems quoted in full.
- [15] "The Light of the Stars."
- [16] Nico Mager, at the time fellow employee in Blussé and v. Braam's bookstore.
- [17] "Memoir of Vincent van Gogh" by Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, in: *The complete letters...*, I: XIX.
- [18] Van Gogh, Vincent: *Sämtliche Briefe in sechs Bänden* edited by Fritz Erpel: Berlin 1968, vol. 6: *Dokumente und Zeugnisse*, p. 93; my translation.
- [19] The complete letters..., III: 594.
- [20] Memoir..., p. XX.
- [21] Huberta du Quense-van Gogh: Vincent van Gogh (1910), in: *Van Gogh. A retrospective*, p.32.
- [22] Van Gogh: *Sämtliche...*, 5: 257; my translation.
- [23] L 573, in: The complete letters..., III: 128.
- [24] L 418, in: The complete letters..., II: 397.
- [25] L 82 a, in: The complete letters..., I: 78.
- [26] Memoir..., p. XX.
- [27] L 266, in: The complete letters..., I: 539.
- [28] L 182, in: The complete letters..., I: 327.
- [29] L 133, in: The complete letters..., I: 194.
- [30] L 10, in: The complete letters..., I: 11.
- [31] L 9a, in: The complete letters..., I: 8.
- [32] L 332, in: The complete letters..., II: 163.
- [33] L 20, in: The complete letters..., I: 21 f.
- [34] L 157, in: The complete letters..., I: 265.
- [35] The complete letters..., I: 87.
- [36] L 94, in: The complete letters..., I: 105.
- [37] L 85, in: The complete letters..., I: 93.
- [38] L 94, in: The complete letters..., I: 105.
- [39] The complete letters..., III: 596 f.
- [40] The complete letters..., I: 169.
- [41] The complete letters..., I: 224.
- [42] see: Arnold: Vincent..., p. 257.

- [43] L 131, in: The complete letters..., I: 190.
- [44] L 132, in: The complete letters..., I: 192.
- [45] L 133, in: The complete letters..., I: 194.
- [46] L 133, in: The complete letters..., I: 194.
- [47] L 138, in: The complete letters..., I: 211.
- [48] L 159, in: The complete letters..., I: 269.
- [49] L 192, in: The complete letters..., I: 349.
- [50] L 212, in: The complete letters..., I: 396.
- [51] L 197, in: The complete letters..., I: 366.
- [52] R 8, in: The complete letters..., III: 323.
- [53] L 117, in: The complete letters..., I: 159 f.
- [54] L 182, in: The complete letters..., I: 328.
- [55] L 195, in: The complete letters..., I: 360.
- [56] L 345, in: The complete letters..., II: 227.
- [57] L 346, in: The complete letters..., II: 321.
- [58] L 347, in: The complete letters..., II: 234.
- [59] L 377, in: The complete letters..., II: 307.
- [60] L 375, in: The complete letters..., II: 303.
- [61] L 375, in: The complete letters..., II: 303.
- [62] L 375, in: The complete letters..., II: 304.
- [63] L 404, in: The complete letters..., II: 370.
- [64] L 459 a, in: The complete letters..., II: 515.
- [65] L 459 a, in: The complete letters..., II: 515.
- [66] L 459, in: The complete letters..., II: 511.
- [67] Arnold, Vincent..., p. 458; my translation.
- [68] Arnold: Vincent..., p. 478; my translation.
- [69] Arnold: Vincent..., p. 478; my translation.
- [70] W 1, in: The complete letters..., III: 426.
- [71] François Gauzi: Lautrec et son temps (1954), in: Van Gogh. A retrospective, p 71 f.
- [72] A. S. Hartrick: A painter's pilgrimage through fifty years (1939), in: Van Gogh. A retrospective, p. 82.
- [73] W 1, in: The complete letters..., III: 435.
- [74] W 1, in: The complete letters..., III: 425 ff.
- [75] Probably "Grapes and Pears."
- [76] Note by Johanna: Vincent uses the unusual spelling "Kristenen" here instead of "Christenen," thereby expressing his aversion to all religious conventionalism. [Editor's note: Studying the original letter, in fact we see that Vincent used the conventional spelling "christenen". We can only wonder at Johanna's motive for this piece of religious mythical nonsense.]
- [77] L 463, in: The complete letters..., II: 525.
- [78] L 470, in: The complete letters..., II: 534.
- [79] L 493, in: The complete letters..., II: 577.
- [80] L 438, in: The complete letters..., II: 454.
- [81] L 612, in: The complete letters..., III: 226.
- [82] L 534, in: The complete letters..., III: 30.
- [83] L 526, in: The complete letters..., III: 18 f.
- [84] L 504, in: The complete letters..., II: 600.
- [85] L 507, in: The complete letters..., II: 607.
- [86] L 557, in: The complete letters..., III: 92.
- [87] Paul Gauguin: Avant et après (1903), in: Van Gogh. A retrospective, p.124.
- [88] Van Gogh. A retrospective, p. 128.
- [89] Gauguin: Avant..., p. 124.

- [90] Gauguin: Avant..., p. 125.
- [91] L 532, in: The complete letters..., III: 25 f.
- [92] R 53, in: The complete letters..., III: 414.
- [93] Van Gogh. *A retrospective*, p. 130.
- [94] Van Gogh. *A retrospective*, p. 130.
- [95] Gauguin: Avant..., p.125 ff.
- [96] L 569, in: The complete letters..., III: 113 f.
- [97] L 569, in: The complete letters..., III: 114.
- [98] Arnold: Vincent..., p. 724; my translation.
- [99] L 571, in: The complete letters..., III: 119 ff.
- [100] L 574, in: The complete letters..., III: 129.
- [101] The letters of Vincent van Gogh, selected and edited by Ronald de Leeuw, translated by Arnold Pomerans, London 1996, p. 430.
- [102] L 576, in: The complete letters..., III: 134.
- [103] L 576, in: The complete letters..., III: 134.
- [104] Arnold: Vincent..., p.751; my translation.
- [105] Memoir..., XLVII.
- [106] L 579, in: The complete letters..., III: 139.
- [107] Arnold: Vincent..., p.257; my translation.
- [108] L 216, in: The complete letters..., I: 407.
- [109] L 216, in: The complete letters..., I: 408.
- [110] L 516, in: The complete letters..., III: 3.
- [111] L 581, in: The complete letters..., III: 144.
- [112] L 579, in: The complete letters..., III: 140.
- [113] L 579, in: The complete letters..., III: 140.
- [114] L 591, in: The complete letters..., III: 169.
- [115] L 592, in: The complete letters..., III: 175.
- [116] L 592, in: The complete letters..., III: 173.
- [117] L 592, in: The complete letters..., III: 174.
- [118] L 596, in: The complete letters..., III: 185.
- [119] L 601, in: The complete letters..., III: 194.
- [120] L 605, in: The complete letters..., III: 208 ff.
- [121] L 574, in: The complete letters..., III: 129.
- [122] L 605, in: The complete letters..., III: 207.
- [123] L 605, in: The complete letters..., III: 208.
- [124] L 635, in: The complete letters..., III: 273.
- [125] L 648, in: The complete letters..., III: 294.
- [126] Adeline Ravoux Carrié: Les cahiers de van Gogh, in: *Van Gogh. A retrospective*, p. 213 f.
- [127] L 132, in: The complete letters..., I: 193.
- [128] L 649, in: The complete letters..., III: 295.
- [129] L 604, in: The complete letters..., III: 202.
- [130] *Sämtliche Briefe*, 6: 52.
- [131] L 607, in: The complete letters..., III: 218.
- [132] Theophile Emile Achille de Bock (1851-1904), Dutch painter and graphic artist, and admirer of the Barbizon school.
- [133] Theo had written that the child was ill; he also spoke of a plan to give up his job and set out on his own. So much was needed, and under the circumstances Vincent as well as Theo had to economize. Theo also wished in his letter that Vincent too might find a wife someday to share his life with him. A few days later Vincent himself came to see Theo and Jo in Paris.
- [134] Theo said that he was leaving for Leiden on Tuesday 15th July 1890, from there he was going to Mesdag on Wednesday and then on to Antwerp; he would be gone about eight days. Thus he should

have been back in Paris on the 23rd or 24th of the month. Since this letter is dated Tuesday the 22nd, and is obviously written in Paris, he must have returned sooner than he expected.

[\[135\]](#) In view of what Theo says of this letter, it cannot be reconciled with any of Vincent's existing letters. Letter 651 is obviously in reply to this one, and the previous letter to Jo and Theo, 649, about the 10th July, does not mention any "violentes querelles domestiques" [violent domestic quarrels].

[\[136\]](#) Vincent said that the paintings owned by him and Theo of other artists, stored at Tanguy's, including the Prévost, were "going to ruin there."